

Developing Life Skills through Physical Activity: A Teaching Personal and Social
Responsibility Model Approach

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Abstract

Ethnographic methods were used to study a weekly after-school physical activity program over an eight-month period. Based on Hellison's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model, the program sought to foster positive life skills amongst youth. The study investigated how the developed program influenced this life skills education experience. Several themes were identified from the data revolving around culture, life skills, pedagogy, and lessons learned. Data suggests that the positive environment developed within the program positively influenced youths' life skill education experience. The topic of ethnicity as it relates to the experience of marginalized youth in physical activity settings is also discussed. This study supports TPSR literature and suggests that effort to establish caring relationships and empower youth contribute to the establishment of a positive atmosphere where life skills education can occur. Beyond this, practical tools were developed through this study to help others deliver life skill education.

Key words: Physical Activity, life skills, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR), culture, marginalized youth

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In order to better understand my work, you need to understand me as an educator, an academic and a person.

Ultimately, I wanted this thesis to be an extension of myself, and the kids with whom I had the pleasure to work. It will reflect our values, persona and essence as human beings and the program we formed together. That being said; pardon the use of quotes, humour and colourful language in expressing our beliefs, ideas and findings within this work. Before I go any further, I feel as though I need to give some insight into the research environment in which this study took place.

In 2010, I began an after-school program based upon the concept of teaching youth life skills through physical activity. The focus was to engage youth in a program that helped to educate them in the skills necessary to be a successful and contributing member of society. Physical activity was used as a means of appealing to the youth and provided the vehicle for this type of education. The details of the program will be discussed throughout this document.

The program ran for two years within a community located in the city of St. Catharines in the Niagara region of Ontario, Canada. At the time of this study, the Niagara region was home to many of its own unique issues with regard to positive development of youth. The specific community was a subsidized housing community, home to many who had recently immigrated to Canada or were refugees. A majority of families were from East African, Central African or Caribbean

descent. As immigrants and refugees, these residents faced a multitude of barriers with regard to their social and economic inclusion. Even highly educated Canadian immigrants often face poverty, discrimination and racism that negatively impact community, family-life, create social isolation and ultimately lead to physical and mental health issues (Canadian Community Economic Development (CED), 2001). As much of the literature suggests, youth living in underserved communities face many risk factors toward their positive growth (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). It is clear that underserved youth face several barriers to their development of positive life skills. However, research has shown that there are several factors that can assist in new Canadians' success. It has been shown that younger generations often have less difficulty adjusting to life in Canada and that a strong network, including a partnering/mentoring aspect, can aid new Canadian success (Canadian CED, 2001). Beyond this, the local Charter for Children's Rights states that basic necessities for youth include, among others, recreation and leisure opportunities so that they may play, create and develop their skills, high quality childhood development opportunities, and quality time with adult role models (Niagara Children's Charter, 2003). One of the main goals of the Department of Community and Social Services for the Region of Niagara is to mitigate the negative effects of low income on children and youth through programs and services. The rationale is that participation in these programs result in increased resilience and favourable health outcomes for children and youth (Arai & Burke, 2007). With these factors in mind, local community organizations developed recreation and leisure programs targeted at aiding the healthy development of youth in communities throughout Niagara.

Given my interest in life skills and my background in physical activity and sport, I volunteered with these local organizations to provide physical and life skill education to disadvantaged youth in the Niagara region. The organizations ran daily after-school programming for the youth of the community, one program for youth aged 5-12 and another for teens aged 13-18.

Throughout 2010, I ran a leadership/physical activity program with the older youth group at the community centre. Together, program leaders (myself and another Masters student) and youth worked through various physical activities, challenges and games to develop life skills. Despite limited space, a successful program was established that got youth moving and engaged in discussion and activities that enabled them to showcase their knowledge and understanding of life skills and physical activity. The year culminated with youth leading physical activities for younger children at a large event; the Unity Games held at Brock University. Over the course of the year, we became very attached to this group of kids. They welcomed us into the group and were excited to see us and participate in activities. There was a lot of promise in such a program.

Though no formal research was conducted during the course of the program, youth exhibited leadership skills, and a variety of positive life skills during the course of the program leading me to believe that a life skills program such as this has great potential with such a group. As program leader, I learned many lessons that proved invaluable for the improvement of the program in its second year. Beyond this, perhaps the most significant benefit of that first year was the development of a strong rapport with the youth of the program. After the conclusion

of the first year of the program in May 2011, I had the opportunity to drop in on the youth during their after school sessions. The welcoming and excited response I received each time (a few even pleaded for me to come back because the latest program was “so boring”!) assured me that I had established the trusting relationship between youth and a caring adult that so many practitioners suggest program success hinges upon. The relationship established prior to the second year of the program helped me to establish a positive atmosphere within the program far quicker than if I were to be starting with a brand new crop of kids. Through longer-term engagement, I already established myself within the community and was accepted as a program leader. This enabled youth to be more open to the activities and suggestions I tried to incorporate within the program.

I spent this first year running the program with the general idea that I wanted youth to be physically active and I wanted to try to use this setting to teach life skills that could have a lasting impact and help them throughout their lives. It was easier said than done, and after running a “successful” leadership/physical activity program, I was looking for ways to continue to improve but realized that I was in need of a little help. I needed more structure to my program as I found I was using every game and life skill I could think of to try to get across to these kids.

My lessons became complex and the life skills messages were quite broad and varied. At the end of it, I had bombarded them with so many different values that they could not possibly have adopted them all. I needed to re-evaluate and simplify my approach. I needed to take Sizer’s “less is more principle” (Sizer, 1992)

to focus on specific values, simplifying my lessons and help kids focus on core values rather than a plethora of values.

Being a young academic and practitioner, I realized that I know very little. I began to look for help with my own issues. When a friend turned me on to the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model, I began to research and understand that this model was exactly what I sought. As a young practitioner, I needed a focused and effective approach to achieving my goals of having youth active while simultaneously teaching them life skills. As a young academic, I needed something grounded in theory to provide a framework for my own study. TPSR provides both of these. However, most importantly, the reasoning behind choosing the TPSR model was that its core values (Hellison, 2011) align closely with my own. This will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 2.

When I first discovered the model, I realized that many of the founding principles were similar to the strategies and values that guide my own teaching. Having a wide variety of experience working with youth, I have begun the development of my own teaching philosophy based on a few main concepts that I have learned to-date. The first and most important is that teaching at its core HAS to be relational! I feel as though no learning can ever occur until there is a strong relationship felt between teacher and learner. This relationship has to be built upon a foundation of trust. The second concept is that as an educator, a strengths perspective is far more effective (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002). I need to find the strengths of the individuals I am educating and build upon those rather than focusing on the qualities or skills they lack. The third concept is based

on self-discovery and empowerment. Through the use of empowerment, students can take ownership over their own education allowing them to discover learning for themselves. Nothing is more rewarding as an educator than helping guide a learner and witnessing a student's "AH HA!" moment of self-discovery. While at a conference, a speaker suggested to try a simple new approach to making refinements. It is amazing to see the result when you simply replace the command of, "You need to do this to improve" with the inviting suggestion of, "I wonder what would happen if you tried this?" (If you are an educator reading this, I urge you to try it out). As I read the TPSR model, all of these concepts were incorporated. Beyond this, there were suggestions of new principles and values that I was interested in trying to weave into my own teaching. As a result, I was sold on the model and immediately sought to incorporate its ideas within my own program.

I have struggled with my relatively newfound label of academic. Personally, I have always struggled with the traditional view of the research world. I naively thought that all research focused too much effort on specific issues and rigorous scientific method that lacked any real-world relevance. As a practitioner, I spent a majority of my life in "the swamp" trying anything and everything to solve the real-world problems that arose. When working with kids, I was always proud of my role as one of the foot soldiers in the fight to create better lives for the youth I work with. However, I realized that this focused effort had an even more focused impact on youth. In order to broaden my reach and help even more kids, a new approach was necessary. This came in the form of a compromise between the realm of the researcher and that of the practitioner.

Ultimately, I wanted this document to be of some practical use for both academics and practitioners, such as myself, who were interested in teaching life skills through physical activity. As a young academic and practitioner, I found it difficult to decide how exactly I was going to teach life skills through physical activity. There was research and resources available that gave general strategies and ideas concerning this type of education, however, I sought something more detailed. I craved examples of exactly how practitioners embedded life skill education strategies into the physical activity they were delivering. I sought answers to questions such as, what activities did they use to highlight life skills, what questions did they ask, what are some of the specific challenges they faced? I wanted more detailed insight into the mind of a practitioner beyond what I found in my research. By documenting the detailed trials, successes and strategies in this endeavour, I hoped that this document could serve as a resource for those attempting to teach life skills.

I was fortunate enough to find a program that allowed me the freedom to attempt the type of research that I felt had more application within the real world. Through my efforts, I tried to expand my knowledge through investigation and research while staying grounded in the delivery of my own program. It was a struggle (and will continue to be) however, it was one that opened many doors and allowed me to continue to do what I love; to impact youth positively through physical activity. The following describes the story of my incredible past two years.

For this study, I was interested in understanding how the program influenced the experience youth had with life skill education. Over the course of the

program, I saw it grow and develop just as much as each individual within it. The program and the group developed a unique atmosphere over time. As a result, I chose to use ethnographic methods to study the program. To develop a further understanding of the program and how it influenced the life skills education experience for youth, I chose to focus on three main research questions:

- 1) How did these youth experience life skill education within the program?
- 2) How did my role as program leader influence this experience with life skill education?
- 3) What aspects of the program facilitated this experience with life skill education?

The research surrounding these questions will be presented in six chapters. The first is the one you are reading now and will provide an introduction to myself as a researcher and the study. The second will provide a review of the literature surrounding life skill education and TPSR. Chapter 3 will provide a description and rationale of the research methods used within this study, explaining how the study was conducted and how each data source contributes to the study as a whole. The fourth will provide the results of the study upon its conclusion. The fifth will provide discussion of the results found and their contribution to the life skill education field. Finally, the sixth will conclude; wrapping everything up.

Come walk with me through the swamp, it's a hell of a ride!

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The following diagram represents the various components that are incorporated within the TPSR model and are, in turn, represented within my own program. Each of these components and their relation to my program will be described within this literature review.

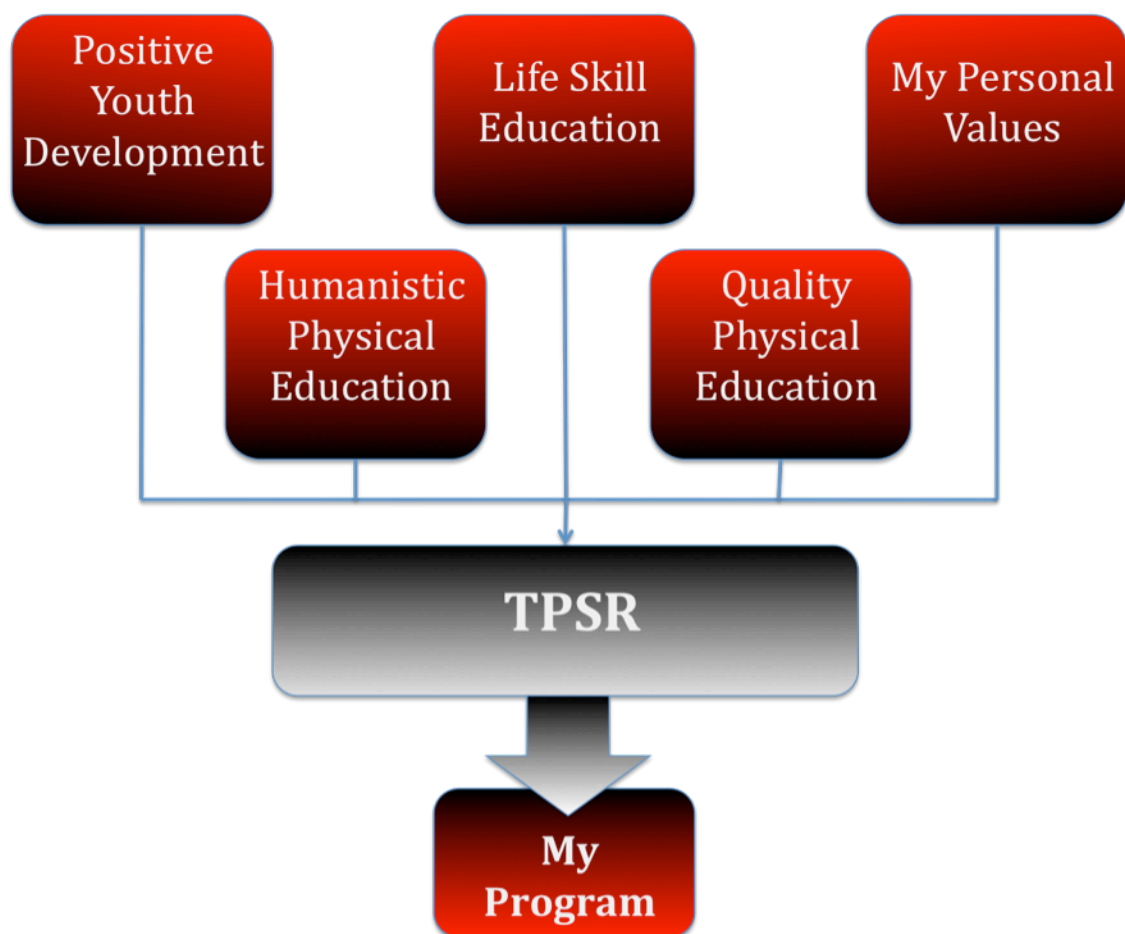


Figure 2.0 Diagram of Literature Review

Physical Activity's Role in Society

Nearly 175 years ago, early physical educators proclaimed the value of physical education and the potential for character development within its curriculum (Solomon, 1997). Termed, Muscular Christianity (Anderson, 2010), it was thought that through physical activity an individual gained both strength of body and spirit. Early physical educators, many of whom had strong ties to religion, believed the uniqueness of the physical education environment provided opportunities to educate youth beyond just the physical. The classic 1857 novel, *Tom Brown's School Days* depicts private school boys that were educated to become proper English gentlemen and moral Christians through participation in physical education, specifically the sport of rugby (Hughes, 1911). The potential of physical education to go beyond the physical realm and educate youth socially and morally is one that was widely lauded in the early 1800's, and this idea has survived to today.

Though the backdrop of sport and education has changed drastically, the idea that physical activity can educate youth physically, but also cognitively and socially, still exists (please note that from this point forward I will refer interchangeably to sport, physical education and physical activity as all can be categorized underneath the umbrella term of physical activity). Ask any youth league coach about the benefits of sport and they will often begin rhyming off a list of personal and social skills that are supposedly gained through a youth's participation in sport during their development. As Shields and Bredemeier (1995) suggest,

“As part of society, sport reflects the prevailing value trends of the broader culture. It is, in fact, a highly symbolic and condensed medium for cultural

values, a vehicle by which many young people come to learn about the core values of their culture. Perhaps this is why the adage that sport builds character persists” (p.1).

Sport has long been considered to mirror society and its values. It has been suggested that successful participation in sport requires certain character attributes that prove beneficial within the realm of sport but also within broader society as well.

Internationally, sport has been recognized as being a powerful tool to promote positive development. The United Nations has recognized that sport has a, “Unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire. By it’s very nature, sport is about participation. It is about inclusion and citizenship. It stands for human values such as respect for the opponent, acceptance of binding rules, teamwork and fairness, all of which are principles which are contained in the Charter of the United Nations... Sport plays a significant role as a promoter of social integration and economic development in different geographical, cultural and political contexts. Sport is a powerful tool to strengthen social ties and networks, and to promote ideals of peace, fraternity, solidarity, non-violence, tolerance and justice” (United Nations, 2011 p. 1).

This statement from the United Nations is centrally important because it encompasses the worldview toward sport. It suggests the universal power of sport as an attractive way to promote human rights. Around the globe sport has been widely accepted as a valuable tool to combat a wide variety of social issues (Kidd, 2008). From teaching personal health and sexual responsibility in AIDS

torn east Africa through soccer, to using basketball to promote communication and cooperation between youth from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in Israel, Northern Ireland and South Africa, to the use of soccer to encourage the inclusion of girls and women, school retention and environmental responsibility, to improving the lives of youth on impoverished aboriginal reserves here in Canada (Kidd, 2008). It would seem that universally, the benefits of participation in sport, physical activity, and play, go far, far beyond the physical. It has long been said that sport is a microcosm of society. Sport, when played properly, encompasses the core values of strong societies. As Bredemeier and Shields (1984) suggested, depending on the context in which sports are taught, sport can actually *discourage* autonomy and influence a person's character development negatively. However, when special care is taken to encourage positive character development, sport can be successful in promoting attributes that are valued within society (Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005). Further, it is suggested that, "Despite the problems associated with contemporary competitive sport, sport is replete with opportunities to encounter, learn, transform, and enact moral values (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, p. 2). Participation in sport and physical activity can expose youth to these core values, making it an ideal space to learn, understand and respect the attributes that are necessary for a civil and just society.

Societal Issues Threatening Positive Youth Development Today

However, as we all know, anyone would be hard pressed to find an “ideal society”, whose citizens exhibit all of these values, in existence today. Today, societies around the world face an abundance of challenges. These challenges influence all members of society, but in particular they strongly influence the youth and adolescence who are attempting to find their place within it. In North America, youth are receiving less guidance from parents due to changes in family structure, workloads and lifestyle. Beyond this, anonymous neighborhoods no longer contribute to the raising of children as they once did in the past (Hellison, 1991). These social constructs are suggested to have influenced the increases in school dropouts, drug abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, gangs, suicide, violence and vandalism, which collectively can be referred to as a, “surge of social pathology” among youth today (Csikszentmihalyi & McCormack, 1986, p. 417). The disadvantages youth face can lead to feelings of helplessness, alienation and exclusion. The feeling of being excluded from society can weaken a youth’s sense of social citizenship and community obligation (Sandford, Armour, & Duncombe, 2008). As I write this, London, England sits under a dark cloud following three nights of looting, rioting and violence caused by “unruly” disadvantaged youth. The media has suggested that there is no cause for these riots, simply stating that lower-class British youth are frustrated due to the minimal opportunities to succeed in society today. This has left youth feeling lost, hopeless and alienated by the society with which they are a part (Cappe, M., *Globe and Mail*, August, 10, 2011). It is sad

evidence of how the lack of citizenship and obligation to the community can manifest in the various acts of rebellion and withdrawal stated previously.

Marginalization of Minority Youth

Compounding the lack of guidance for many youth are the economic and social barriers that can negatively influence their development and success. As Carl James and Keren Braithwaite (1996) suggest, for African-Canadian youth in particular, factors inherent in the structure of society and specifically the school system lead to fewer African-Canadian students attaining the higher levels of education necessary for future success. They go on to explain that this phenomenon is not related to a lack of parental encouragement, low educational aspirations or poor understanding of their situation in society, but to the barriers created by the school itself and those who educate them (Braithwaite & James, 1996). The systematic racism that is felt by minority youth, specifically African- Canadian youth, can lead to further feelings of alienation and exclusion toward broader society. As a result, these youth are marginalized and placed in a disadvantaged position with regard to future achievement and success.

Positive Youth Development Movement as a Response to Marginalization and Negative Influences

In response to the marginalization and variety of negative influences that many youth face today, the area of Positive Youth Development (PYD) has emerged.

As Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, and Anderson (2002) state, positive youth development,

“...involves positive change in the relation between a developing person—who is committed and able to contribute positively to self, family, and community—and a community supporting the development of such a citizen” (p. 15).

The positive youth development perspective emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people—including young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those with the most troubled histories (Damon, 2004). This area is one that has been established within the research world through considerable literature and theoretical models. Recently, PYD has taken a strengths perspective toward youth, suggesting that they possess a number of positive attributes and are “resources to be developed” (Lerner et. al, 2002). Society in general has often taken a deficit approach, viewing youth as having weaknesses and inadequacies, suggesting that they are “problems to be managed”.

According to Lerner (2002), “all youth possess the potential for systematic change throughout life” (p.12). This change is dependant on a bidirectional person-context relationship between the developing person and a community influencing their development. A youth is said to be “thriving” when he or she makes culturally valued contributions to self, others, and institutions, through healthy, positive relations with the community (Lerner, 2002). In other words, a youth needs to feel connected and supported by a community in order to make healthy and positive choices regarding their relationship with it. These individuals must learn to shift the

focus from solely their own interests to the overall well being of the community. These youth must build upon the social skills they possess while continuing to develop new skills in order to be a thriving and contributing member of society. The skills necessary to be a thriving member of society have been termed “life skills”. More specifically, Steve Danish, a leading advocate for life skill development in youth has defined life skills as, “those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home and in their neighbourhoods” (Danish, Taylor, Hodge, & Heke, 2004, p. 40). He goes on to explain that these skills can be physical (i.e. kicking a ball), behavioural (i.e. effective communication with peers), or cognitive (i.e. effective decision-making) while the environments they are needed in are families, schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods and communities (Danish & Nellen, 1997). Recently, PYD programs have begun to arise the focus on the education of life skills.

Life Skill Education

The education system has often been relied upon as the main socializing agent for youth. One might argue that it is not the educator’s responsibility to socialize youth, it is the family’s. However, education plays a critical role within this realm:

“A nation’s well-being, as well as it’s ability to compete, is conditioned by a single pervasive cultural characteristic-the level of social capital inherent in the society...Education has always been a source of social vitality and the more people we can include in the community of learning, the greater the

benefits to us all. The very process involves interaction between people; it is the means by which the values and wisdom of a society are shared and transmitted” (Kennedy, 1997, p. 6).

Kennedy’s idea that the strength of a nation depends on a collective social mentality and the use of education as a “community of learning” creates the opportunity for youth to be further educated on what it means to be a positive member of society. Today, due to the broad social changes occurring, educators can see youth in their classrooms more than their parents do at home. As a result, educators now find themselves having to teach beyond the curriculum, educating their pupils in the life skills necessary to be a valued and contributing member of society. In today’s world, it is up to educators to help fill the socializing void in many of their students’ lives.

The role of educators as life skill developers is one that is universally found. The importance of such education is clearly reflected through the inclusion of life skill education within UNICEF’s goal of quality education. Their “life skills-based education” can result in quality learners achieving quality educational outcomes. Through quality content that addresses issues relevant to the lives of learners, youth acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills and ultimately behaviours that are key to their future success (UNICEF, 2011).

Use of Physical Education to Teach Life Skills

The province of Ontario, considered a leader in curriculum development, has recently incorporated a life skills education strand within their most current

physical education curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), suggesting that nature of the Physical Education (or physical activity) environment makes it a natural setting for this type of education.

While conducting a study in El Salvador, principals were asked what PE meant to their schools. One principal simply responded, “My students never miss a day when they have Physical Education class.” Similarly, another replied that, “Physical education is the soul of the school” (Mandigo, Corlett, & Anderson, 2008 p. 115). With such powerful statements from educators and scholars around the world, it would seem obvious that PE has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of life skills in youth. But what is it about physical activity that makes it such an ideal vehicle for this type of education?

First of all, activity is fun and enjoyable for kids. As the UN states, “sport has a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire” (United Nations Sport for Development and Peace, 2011 p. 1). It is considered a “cultural magnet” with the ability to draw individuals in and “educate by stealth”(Steer, 2000 p. 17). Those participating in the activity enjoy it but also are able to be educated upon something they may not have responded to before. Hellison would suggest that “the nature of physical activity- active, interactive, highly emotional- certainly provides the possibility of exploring and practicing values, teamwork, goal-setting, peer-teaching, conflict resolution and so on (Martinek & Hellison, 1997, p. 44). “Why role-play conflict resolution in the classroom when real conflicts begging for a resolution erupt all the time in the gym?” (Hellison, 2000, p. 36). The physical education environment brings with it unique situations in the form of teachable moments,

where educators have the opportunity to teach students valuable life lessons with concrete examples that arise in class. Hellison further suggests that physical education provides an environment, with its loose, hands-on, active, multidimensional (not just verbal) approach, that is the perfect place to examine one's self and personal value system (Hellison, 1978). Individuals can be challenged to explore decisions, feelings and values within the physical education environment. Allowing them to develop core values and practice their decision-making skills in a safe environment is essential.

So why not utilize PE to draw learners in, engage them and help teach these valuable life skills? Well, the current state of many PE classrooms in North America would suggest that many are not environments where such learning can take place (Ennis, 2000).

Issues with Traditional Physical Education Approaches

Despite the widely accepted view of the benefits of sport and physical activity, throughout North America, physical education students often resist efforts to be included by refusing to dress, expend effort or participate (Ennis, 2000). Many blame students for their unresponsiveness and unwillingness to participate (Ennis, 2000). However, as Ennis (2000) suggests, "these students provide an early warning system to alert us to ineffective, negative, or harmful pedagogical practices" (p. 120). Ennis is quite critical of the traditional approach to physical education curriculum as it lacks proper educational sequencing and significant instructional

periods, it promotes elitism and embarrassment through public displays of ability, it lacks opportunities to equalize playing opportunities for lower skilled individuals, and finally it significantly lacks opportunities for students to take ownership of and leadership within their own education. She calls for a new approach to the curricula being used in PE classrooms, one that is more relevant, engaging and student-focused (Ennis, 1999). Traditional pedagogical practices result in a PE environment that is tailored to those who are already skilled in physical activity, while neglecting those students who need the practice most. When individuals feel a lack of competency with regard to their abilities, their motivation to participate is severely impaired (Lubans, Morgan, Cliff, Barnett, & Okely, 2011) As a result, less skilled individuals will attempt to protect their ego and avoid embarrassment through disengaging and refusing to participate (Ennis, 2000).

This phenomenon is not exclusive to North America; the same findings have been echoed in other Western societies worldwide. In the United Kingdom, many physical education environments, "...represent situations in which young people see no purpose, fear failure, experience destructive relationships with teachers, or learn irresponsibility through a lack of agency" (Sanford, Armour, & Warmington, 2006 p. 258). There are unnerving similarities between the traditional pedagogical practices common throughout the Western world and the negative climate it creates within the physical education classroom.

When understood this way, who could blame a student for not wanting to participate? The traditional physical education environment is often one of exclusion and intimidation. With a culture such as this, it often contributes to youth

feeling excluded, alienated and uncared for, thus leading to disassociation and negative behaviours discussed previously. How can educators hope to teach positive life skills through physical education within such a climate? There has been a call for the physical education field to provide a more educative experience for their students. Dyson, Griffin and Hastie (2004) suggest that, “It is time for our field to engage in reconstruction of the culture of physical education through models-based instruction that uses pedagogical models...which can restructure the way teachers do their work” (p. 237). In other words, there is a need for PE educators to base their teachings on sound pedagogical principles to provide a more student-centered and holistic approach to the physical education experience.

A Different Approach to Physical Education

There is a need to take a different approach to physical education that specifically focuses on ensuring engagement and establishing a positive learning environment. Such programs are focused on the development of the “whole child” where the physical, cognitive and social domains of their personality are addressed rather than just the physical. As Nel Noddings (1992), an expert in the field of values education put it,

“The physical self is only part of the self. We must be concerned also with the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual self, and clearly these are not discrete. We separate and label them for convenience in discussion, but it may be a mistake to separate them sharply in curriculum” (p. 49).

There is a need for physical educators to take a more holistic approach to their classrooms. Traditionally, physical education has tried to separate the domains coming to focus on the physical. However, in today's world, there is an overwhelming need for physical education to address more than just the physical. With youth struggling to find guidance and support, the physical education classroom needs to shift its focus to a holistic approach that better provides these. As Hellison (1973) would describe it, such an approach is a more "human" way of educating leading him to coin the term "Humanistic Physical Education" (p.2). He suggests that humanistic physical education needs to be student-centered and based on the development of the whole person. Through such an approach, educators can get students to engage physically in their classroom, but it also opens the door to addressing the students' cognitive and social learning. A large part of this learning includes the education and adoption of life skills.

The Shift from the Classroom to the After School Program

To this point, the concept of life skill education has been discussed in relation to the confines of the traditional PE classroom. However, it should be noted that developing life skills, as well as learning in general, occurs in less-formal educational settings outside of the classroom. Though the setting is less formal, the same sound pedagogical principles, challenges, and issues still apply to these physical activity programs outside the school.

Within academia, there have been a growing number of programs focused on using physical activity and sport to provide life skills education for youth. The use of varied approaches, from, martial arts (Wright, White & Gaebler-Spira, 2004), to fitness programs (Collingwood, 1997), to outdoor education (Priest & Gass, 2005), to sports programs (Hellison, 1988, Siedentop, 1994), have been used to accomplish the task of providing a socio-moral education through physical activity. The list of positive skills and abilities that youth are believed to develop and refine through these programs is extensive, including, life skills in general (Danish et al., 2004), resiliency (Martinek & Hellison, 1997), goal-setting, positive thinking (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005), managing failure (Jones & Lavallee, 2009), personal and social responsibility (Hellison, 2011; DeBusk & Hellison, 1989), improved self-esteem, self-concept and self worth (Collingwood, 1997), cooperation and sense of community (Ennis, 1999), team-building skills (Priest & Gass, 2005), empathy (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995), and moral-sense (Miller, Bredemeier, & Shields, 1997). It is clear that programs that use physical activity to help youth develop positive life skills and socio-moral education can be quite successful.

However, mere participation in such a program does not ensure that individuals will understand and adopt these life skills. The concepts of life skills can often be abstract and difficult for individuals to understand. If you were to ask a group of students what respect is, the answers may vary significantly from pupil to pupil. As Hodge (1989) commented, character is taught, not caught, meaning that educators need to make a concerted effort to include life skill education into their lessons and not just assume that by participating students will learn and *understand*

concepts such as teamwork and cooperation (Hodge, 1989). Educators must work to incorporate life skill education into their lessons and are able to connect students learning to some of the abstract ideas and values presented. Just as concepts of a mathematics lesson are not inherently understood, teachers must also take the same time to help youth understand what it takes to be a positive contributing member of society.

Common Pedagogical Elements of Successful Programs

Research on such programs has begun to reveal common elements of successful programs that promote life skills through physical activity. Leaders within the field have come up with a list of key criteria for successful youth development programs:

- Treat youth as resources to be developed- building on their strengths
- Focus on developing the whole person- the social, emotional, cognitive and physical
- Respect the individuality of each youth
- Empower youth
- Give youth clear expectations based on a strong set of values
- Help youth envision possible futures
- Provide a physically and emotionally safe environment
- Small program numbers and long-term participation to increase sense of belonging and membership

- Maintain a local connection in the community
- Provide courageous and persistent leadership when facing obstacles
- Provide significant contact with a caring adult

(Hellison & Cutforth, 1997)

These criteria are based upon research regarding youth development programs. They provide an excellent framework for any youth development program leader based upon sound pedagogical principles. The following will provide further evidence of some of the crucial aspects of successful youth development programs.

One of the most critical components of such a program are the social relationships that youth engage in while present. These social relationships that youth experience while participating in physical activity programs are the most significant factor in effecting behavioural change (Sandford et al., 2006). In physical activity settings, the social nature has been found to promote involvement in tasks and the attractiveness of the setting (Hastie & Siedentop, 1999). Connected to this is the need for youth to feel as though they are part of a community (Sandford et al., 2006). Ennis echoes this when she describes the need for a successful program environment as reflecting a sense of family (Ennis, 2000). In this sense, youth feel as though they are cared for and valued while participating in the program. These feelings can be established through the social connections between peers and program facilitators. A facilitator can help to establish a connection with youth that is based on a genuine interest and care for them (something that is often lacking in the lives of many youth). Program leaders can show youth a level of respect that is often lacking in the student-educator relationship by involving young people in key

decisions regarding the program. This also enables students to develop a sense of empowerment and ownership over their own learning, helping motivate them to become more invested in it (Ennis, 1999).

For individuals participating in an activity, motivation is found to increase when they are given some control and choice with regard to the learning process, while motivation decreases when they feel controlled by something external such as a teacher or educator (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In an attempt to further increase motivation and investment in an individual's learning, facilitators need to attempt to make the program and curriculum being learned directly relevant and meaningful to their lives (Ennis, 2000). The traditional teacher approach of simply stating that these lessons are "good for you" or will help "later in life" are not enough to intrinsically motivate youth to want to learn. As Ennis suggests, no one can judge the immediate relevance and value of the life lessons being taught better than the youth who are actually experiencing them (Ennis, 2000). Therefore, by involving individuals in decisions regarding the design and delivery of a program, youth can steer content toward issues and subjects that are directly connected and relevant to their lives.

All of these elements provide further support that life skills education does not just occur spontaneously and that a great deal of time, effort and planning needs to occur to ensure a programs success. It is clear that traditional approaches do not possess the capability to accomplish this. Luckily for me, all of these concepts are present and scientifically tested within Don Hellison's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model.

The Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Model

With this life skill education idea in mind, the idea of Humanistic Physical Education emerged. Based on sound pedagogical principles, this new approach sought to provide a more student-centered, relational, and positive experience for teaching life skills to youth (Hellison & Templin, 1991). The approach now manifests itself in the form of the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model. The goal of this model is to help youth develop basic life skills through the use of physical activity in order to ensure their ability to thrive into adulthood. Since its inception, the model has continued to gain acceptance and is considered a leader with regard to teaching youth life skills through physical activity (Martinek, 2008). This universal acceptance, combined with the alignment of the TPSR's core values with that of my own, led to its use within this research study. This alignment will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Don Hellison's TPSR model is an evidence-based approach to structuring learning environments that use physical activity to educate youth on the life skills necessary to be a positive and contributing member of society. As the man himself suggests, "the ultimate goal of TPSR is to help develop good citizens" (personal communication, 9 June 2011). The lessons being learned within the program are transferred and applied within the lives of the youth participating. Hellison originally designed the model for use with "at-risk", or as he prefers, "underserved" youth in the inner-city Chicago area nearly 40 years ago. The model was designed

with the original intention of aiding marginalized youth and continues to do so today. Over the years, Hellison along with those who have adopted the model, have continuously tinkered with and tested it, helping to expand its application from after-school physical activity programs to physical education (Hellison, 2011), sport (Hellison, 2011) and teaching education settings (Siedentop, 1994). The model has also successfully been implemented in other countries such as New Zealand, England and Spain (Lee & Martinek, 2009). The growth and universal identification with the model are a testament to its success and application within the field. The reason I chose to use this program is that I identified with its core values as an educator, but also as a human being. Beyond its values, the commitment to rigorous testing and evaluation of TPSR programs has established it as a scientifically sound process without losing its success within the field. According to Lee and Martinek, "Hellison's model is viewed as an exemplary curriculum model that influences humanistic and social development in individuals and helps to promote life skills" (Lee & Martinek, 2009 p. 230). It has been described as an influential humanistic and social development model for physical education (Siedentop, 1994) and an alternative form of physical education that can address the social conditions that place youth at-risk. The TPSR approach has been tried and tested. It's success both qualitatively and quantitatively and on the ground is based upon sound pedagogical principles that create a link between these two worlds. I will now provide the theoretical framework of the model in hopes that it will become clear as to why I am using many aspects of this model to help in the design my own program.

To begin, Hellison is careful to suggest that,

“...imposing a structure threatens to reduce [a program’s] humanity by overlooking the idiosyncratic zigzag nature of the educational process. My compromise is to provide a framework- not a rigid structure or blueprint – of the basic values, ideas and implementation strategies that honors the craft of teaching.” (Hellison, 2011, p 17).

In other words, the framework is here for educators to use if they identify with its values. The structure of the model is not rigid, leaving room for those implementing it to adjust and tailor it toward the group they are working with.

Core Values of TPSR. The TPSR model is based upon four core values that guide its delivery. The first value is “*putting kids first*” (Hellison, Cutforth, Kallusky, Martinek, Parker & Stiehl, 2000), meaning that the focus of the program is on trying to develop better citizens rather than worrying about putting the physical activity, sport, fitness or oneself before them. The second core value is that of promoting *human decency*. In other words, we need to help each other more than compete against each other. Youth need to be supported and learn to act kindly, negotiate with others and control the inclination to put themselves first (Hellison, 2011, p. 18). The third core value is that of *holistic self-development*. The youth entering the program have emotional and social as well as physical needs and interests. As a physical educator, we cannot simply focus on the physical development of an individual, rather we need to ensure that we incorporate and support their cognitive, social and emotional development (Hellison, 2011, p. 18). The development of the whole person is the ideal outcome. Finally, the fourth core value

is that TPSR is not a way of teaching but a *way of being* (Hellison, 2011, p. 19). As a program leader, you need to identify with the program and its values in order to successfully relay these to those you are educating. If you identify the core values of the program as being important and aligning with your own personal values, you will be motivated to live and breathe them in everything you do. This can make the incorporation of these values (into the design of your own program and the use of them on a daily basis) a natural process.

There are crucial responsibilities of program leaders that reflect the underlying values of the program. These responsibilities also reflect the common, evidence-based elements of successful life skills education programs discussed previously. These again reflect my own values embedded within my philosophy of education thus drawing me toward the use of this model even further.

First is the gradual empowerment of youth within the program. Leaders must be able to relinquish some control and shift the responsibility of the program to the youth gradually (Hellison, 2011). This shift happens slowly over time as youth demonstrate their ability to handle such responsibility. It can begin with simply having youth share feelings and thoughts about the program, to having them make decisions within it and eventually having them take on leadership roles within the program. By empowering the individuals with increased responsibility, it is hoped that this will motivate and invest them further in their learning. Further, intrinsic motivation is enhanced when individuals participate in activities that are optimally challenging, as they feel self-determined and competent in doing so (Deci, 1975). By providing various levels of responsibility within the program, the level of challenge

can be adjusted to meet the needs of each individual. This allows a variety of youth to select the optimal level of challenge for themselves within the same program, leading to feelings of competence, self-determination and intrinsic motivation. It is the responsibility of the program leader to provide these opportunities for youth within the program. As Hellison suggests, the art of loosening and tightening the level of responsibility that each student can handle takes considerable skill on behalf of the leader (Hellison, 2011).

Second is the necessity of self-reflection as a program leader. As Socrates once said, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Anderson, 1967, p. 10), suggesting that in order to reach our full potential, we need to constantly look inwards to evaluate and examine ourselves. A program leader must have the ability and humility to critically self-reflect upon the daily and overall decisions made within the program (Hellison, 2011). This is essential to ensuring the program is adjusted and tailored on a regular basis to meet the needs of the youth participating.

Third is the concept of transference. This is ultimately the most important goal of any life skills education program, to have the youth be able to take what they have developed within the gym setting and make use of it in their everyday lives. Going back to Hellison’s goal of helping create good citizens, the learning that is done within the gym setting needs to have the ability to be transferred out into the real world. This is not an automatic process, but by empowering youth to make the right choices and explore possibilities in a safe environment within the program, one can hope that they will be able to embody these choices to an extent that allows for their application elsewhere (Hellison, 2011). Referring back to Ennis’s

comments regarding the creation of a sense of community or family within a program, such an environment can allow youth to feel safe enough to explore decisions without fear of failure or embarrassment.

Finally, perhaps the most important responsibility for a program leader is to be relational with kids. Hellison describes this as being able to respect the strengths, individuality, voice and decision-making capabilities of each youth entering the program. It requires leaders to understand that, “Each student has strengths, not just deficiencies that need to be fixed” (Hellison, 2011, p. 26). With regard to *strengths*, the view is one that aligns with my own philosophy as well as the Positive Youth Development literature that suggests, “youth are not broken, in need of psychosocial repair, or problems to be managed” (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas & Lerner, 2005). Program leaders must take a strengths perspective with regard to the youth entering the program, building upon the skills they already possess rather than focusing solely on ones they lack. McLaughlin, a leading voice in the area of after-school programs for disadvantaged youth has found that youth are not interested in programs that focus on trying to fix deficits rather than building on strengths and try to promote the values of the dominant, middle-class nuclear family rather than that of their own culture (McLaughlin & Heath, 1993). Leaders need to understand and respect the *individuality* of each youth entering the program. We all have various, cultures, strengths, weaknesses, feelings, dreams, fears and values and want them to be respected and recognized (Hellison, 2011). Rather than trying to get everyone to act the same, why not celebrate each individual’s uniqueness? As Roberts-Fiati, an expert with regard to marginalization

in education, conscious efforts to incorporate material that reflects the lives of youth can help to foster a sense of belonging, competence and worth (Roberts-Fiati, 1996). Beyond this TPSR suggests that each youth has a unique *voice*, opinion and perspective upon entering the program. Each individual has knowledge that others lack. By listening to each individual's viewpoint, youth feel cared for but program leaders can also improve programs. Finally, each individual has the capacity to make *good decisions*; often they just lack the practice in doing so (Hellison, 2011). By offering them a safe environment where they are able to make mistakes and reflect upon their decisions with guidance, youth can have the opportunity to improve in this regard. As discussed previously, the nature of the physical education classroom provides ample opportunity for students to practice skills such as peaceful conflict resolution when situations requiring these skills erupt constantly (Hellison et al., 2000).

Beyond these values, there is also a set of assumptions that are important to the TPSR model. The first is that physical activity provides a unique opportunity to develop personally and socially, however this does not occur automatically (Hellison, 2011). This concept was touched on earlier and highlights the necessity of proper goals, strategies and teacher qualities in order for the success of a program. Secondly, programs need to follow Sizer's (1992) less-is-more principle when it comes to the goals of the program. Programs with a few specific goals are far more effective than those with many. Focusing on these can be far more beneficial for both the facilitators and youth who are participating. Finally, since physical activities are the basis of the program, leaders must be competent in the material

they are teaching. In order to properly embed the TPSR principles into a physical activity program, an educator needs to understand the content, pedagogical skills and activities they are delivering (Hellison, 2011).

Again, these core values of the TPSR program are those that closely align with my own pedagogical philosophy. That being said, this alignment allows me to incorporate these into my program and also allows me to adopt it as “a way of being” (Hellison, 2011, p. 19).

The TPSR Program Structure. The TPSR model is based on a system that consists of five levels of responsibility. The idea is that individuals within the program have concrete expectations that they can refer to during the course of the program. Individuals can reflect on their own behaviour during the program and see where they fit each day. The levels are as follows:

Level 1: Respect for the right and feelings of others

- Self-control of temper and words
- Respect everyone’s right to be included
- Respect the right to peaceful and democratic conflict resolution

Level 2: Effort and Teamwork

- Self-motivation to explore self-effort, try new tasks and persist in tasks
- Cooperation and getting along with others

Level 3: Self-direction

- On-task independent work
- Goal-setting progression with courage to resist peer pressure

Level 4: Helping and Leadership

- Sensitivity and responsiveness to others' needs and interests
- Contribution to the well-being of both individuals and the group
- Inner strength

Level 5: Transfer outside the gym

- Trying these ideas outside the physical activity program
- Being a positive role model for others

(Hellison & Walsh, 2002)

These levels of responsibility provide structure and a reflective tool for youth and the program leader to reference with regard to the behaviours exhibited within the program.

Evidence of TPSR in Action. There is considerable research evidence of TPSR in action. Hellison and Walsh (2002) conducted a literature review of 26 studies that investigated the impact of the TPSR model on youth. This was conducted to highlight the empirical basis the model is based upon (Hellison & Walsh, 2002).

The following studies showed the impact of the TPSR model on individuals' improvement with regard to the goals of the model. Strong evidence showed improvement in *self-control* (DeBusk & Hellison, 1989; Georgiadis, 1990; Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Kahne, Nagaoka, Brown, O'Brien, Quinn, & Thiede, 2001, Kallusky, 2000; Lifka, 1990; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992), *effort* (Compagnone, 1995; Hellison, 1978; Lifka, 1990; Wright, 2001), *leadership* (Walsh, Ozaeta, & Wright,

2010), *helping others* (Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001), *self-worth* (Hellison, 1978; Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Lifka 1990), *self-direction* (Lifka, 1990; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001), *teamwork/cooperation* (Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001), *communication skills* (Cutforth, 1997; Kallusky, 2000; Lifka, 1990), *interpersonal relations* (Cutforth, 1997; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001; Wright et al., 2004), *sense of responsibility* (Compagnone, 1995; Kallusky, 2000), and *commitment* (Schilling, 2001).

Nikos Georgiadis' (1992) after-school physical activity program is of particular interest. His program focused on using basketball as the vehicle for delivering a TPSR program among at-risk youth in one of Chicago's most notorious neighborhoods. He documents the struggles involved in the initiation and running of the program, highlighting the necessity of having strong, resilient leadership. Over the course of eight weeks, "the improvement made at Level 1 [respect] was remarkable" (Georgiadis, 1992 p. 42) with verbal and non-verbal abuse becoming nearly nonexistent. Testimony from students following the program highlights the positive learning environment that was established in the program and also reflects the lessons learned in respect, cooperation and teamwork. Georgiadis' program is a shining example of how the TPSR model can be used to reach youth; helping them to grow and learn through activity they love. This was the type of environment I hoped to establish within my own program.

With regard to individuals transferring skills learned in a TPSR program to their lives outside the gym, the following studies showed various positive results.

Strong evidence suggests that participation in the program helped improve self-control in the classroom (Cutforth, 1997; DeBusk & Hellison, 1989; Martinek, McLaughlin, & Schilling, 1999), effort in the classroom (Martinek et al., 1999; Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001), self-esteem in the classroom (Martinek et al., 2001), sense of ability (Wright et al., 2004), being a positive force in the community (Kahne et al., 2001), and teacher reprimands and office referrals (Martinek et al., 1999).

Tom Martinek's "Project Effort" program (1999) in Greensboro, North Carolina is one that uses a two-headed approach to using the TPSR model. The first is a sport club that uses various forms of physical activity along with the levels of responsibility, to help youth develop life skills. The focus of the program is on transference, helping youth to take the skills developed in the program to other environments. The second aspect is a unique mentorship program between youth and a university student. The aim of this program is to establish a caring connection between educator and learner, allowing for learning to occur. The importance of being relational with the youth in the program is a priority. Graduate and undergraduate students receive specialized training before working with youth to increase their ability to provide a trusting relationship with a caring adult for youth who often lack this. The success of a youth within Project Effort often hinges on the rapport established between themselves and the mentor. Martinek suggests that "trust building became an essential prerequisite to doing any type of meaningful goal setting" (Martinek et al. 2001). Project Effort is another example of a highly

successful TPSR program. The use of a mentorship aspect is something I look to incorporate within my own program.

The following studies examined the experience that the individuals had while participating in a TPSR program. Strong evidence showed participants experienced fun/enjoyment (Kahne et al., 2001; Schilling, 2001; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992), interaction with a caring adult (Cutforth & Pluckett, 1999), a sense of belonging (Schilling, 2001) and felt safe (Wright, 2001).

The evidence provided above shows the success of TPSR programs from both the perspective of the researcher as well as participants. The TPSR research is filled with testimony from youth involved that further suggests this type of program can reach and inspire them. This testimony provides further motivation for me to use the TPSR model for my own program. The levels of responsibility, the daily program format, along with the lessons learned and suggestions from those who have delivered TPSR modeled programming will be incorporated within my own program and will be discussed further in... what?

My Research

Researchers to date have done a considerable job of documenting the outcomes of TPSR programs being successfully run. The TPSR model has been successfully adjusted and applied to programs working with a wide variety of populations, but what is it about these programs that make them so successful? Through my research, I seek to provide insights, reflections and lessons learned

during the process of establishing a program. My ultimate goal is to provide a document that aids like-minded individuals in their attempts to use physical activity to teach life skills. Those in the research world who have used and studied the TPSR model have often been focused on the program evaluation aspect. For this study, I choose to shift my focus toward an understanding of the program that developed and how it influenced youths' experience with life skill education. The purpose of this study is to use modified ethnographic methods to:

- 1) Understand how youth experienced life skill education within the program.
- 2) Understand how my role as program leader influenced this experience with life skill education.
- 3) Understand the aspects of the program that facilitated this experience with life skill education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Structure of the Program

The first year of the program began in 2010 and consisted of myself and another graduate student who would run physical activity/leadership sessions at the Community centre known as “Everyone’s Space” (pseudonym). Typically, we had about 8-10 youth participating during each weekly two-hour session.

Everyone’s Space existed within one of the community’s central townhouses. It was a small living-room area that had been converted into a space where a wide variety of after-school programming (homework club, art classes, baking, movie nights, etc.) can be run. Outside, there was also a fenced in basketball court that was used frequently for activities requiring more space. As program leaders, we needed to be very resourceful and creative when it came to designing each session given the small area available and the impact of weather during the winter months of the program.

Each week we would meet with the group, engage in some fun physical activity, games, and sports, while also taking the time to discuss certain life skills and leadership qualities that were used within them. We talked often about their role as leaders within the different communities they were a part of. According to Sizer, mastery of any physical or mental skill takes a great deal of practice (Sizer, 1992). Life skills are of no exception and the program sought to offer youth the opportunity to do so. The ultimate goal of the program was to help youth become

aware of and practice these life skills within a safe and accepting environment. The culminating task for the program was to have participants run a physical activity station for the Unity Games event in May 2011. The Unity Games was an event that sought to teach life skills through physical activity for children involved in various community-based programs across the Niagara Region. The youth were responsible for designing a game that taught a certain life skill, organizing it, running it and debriefing it for the children at the Unity Games.

Over the course of the program, the youth learned about life skills and practiced these through physical activity. They were able to design a game and facilitate it successfully during the Unity Games event. Beyond this, a group from the community also performed a dance presentation at the closing ceremonies of the Unity Games. The Unity Games gave them the opportunity to showcase their leadership skills successfully. As the program facilitator, I could not have been more proud of their accomplishments during that culminating task.

For the second year of the program, the ultimate goal was still the same; I sought to provide a program that helps youth learn valuable life skills that will help them beyond its walls. The culminating event was to once again design and facilitate some form of physical activity and life skills education for younger children attending the Unity Games 2012. This year's program commenced in September 2011 and concluded with the Unity Games event in April 2012.

In an attempt to improve the second year of the program, several key issues needed to be addressed. The first was the limited space available to run programming. The small space made it incredibly difficult to provide meaningful

physical activity to youth, often resulting in us having to head outside onto a tennis court that was often dangerously icy, had bottles smashed on it, or other community members that would interfere with programming. Heading into the second year, I worked with two local organizations to secure gym space at a local elementary school within walking distance of the community. This additional space helped to improve the quality of programming that can be offered to these youth through increased variety and safety.

The second issue that needed to be addressed was the organization of the lessons each day. As I commented earlier, the first year of the program consisted of me blindly trying to incorporate life skills education into physical activity based on my previous experiences in physical and leadership education settings. I often felt that the focus of the program was too broad, touching superficially on so many life skills without providing deep understanding of many. As Hellison (2011) commented, many educators think they are incorporating life skills education within their lessons, but merely stating some life skills that youth should have learned through the activity is not enough. The addition of the TPSR framework helped significantly with this.

Daily Program Structure

Before we begin to examine how to study this program, a description of the program's structure is needed. This structure framed the delivery of the program on a daily basis. I molded my lessons and physical activities within this framework.

Relational Time. The purpose of relational time was to establish rapport and a caring relationship with youth in the program. As Hellison suggests, “because the relationship with kids is crucial to making TPSR work, connecting one on one is essential (2011, p. 50). Informal activity time before, during and after the program (i.e. walking to the program, a shoot-around, or simple ice-breaker game) allowed program leaders the opportunity to have quality exchanges between youth and themselves as the caring adult. As the research suggests, interaction with a caring adult is critical for keeping youth committed and enjoying the program (Georgiadis, 1990). The focus of these periods was to convey to each youth that he/she was unique as an individual and that as the leader you recognized and appreciated this. In doing so, youth got quality exposure to a caring adult on a regular basis.

Awareness Talk. Awareness talk formally began the program by bringing the individuals together as a group to discuss the structure of the day. The purpose of this awareness talk was to remind youth what the program was about (responsibility) and start to introduce some of the levels of responsibility to them (respect, effort, caring, etc). I used visuals representing each of the levels for easy referral during the program. The awareness talk provided a focus for each lesson, framing the activities within the specific lessons or ideas we were trying to incorporate. It was important to keep the talk brief and focused on youth discussion rather than program leader preaching. As time passed, I challenged youth to engage

and lead discussion with less of my prompting or support, empowering them further.

Physical Activity. The physical activity portion of the program was where a majority of the time was spent and was ultimately the reason why most youth came each week. As Hellison (2011) contends, the purpose of the physical activity is to make the TPSR ideas come alive by embedding them within the content. The awareness talk provided the framework for the day, but the activity allowed youth to experience and test some of these ideas out for themselves in a safe environment. During the initial weeks of the program, I used more of a direct instruction approach while the youth began to understand what was expected of them with regard to the levels of responsibility. As time progressed, I surrendered more control over to them, empowering them to be involved in programming decisions, daily format, and leading activities.

Group Meeting. Following the activity, the youth gathered together to discuss the events of that day. This was a time for youth to practice their democratic skills as they were given the opportunity to express their views of that day's lesson, how the group performed as a whole, and how my leadership was. They could raise issues and be asked to discuss possible solutions as a group. The purpose was to get youth to practice their group decision-making skills and increase their understanding that they *can* make a difference through a democratic group process. Many students had little experience evaluating leadership within their lives. As time

passed, they began to understand that their input was valued and necessary for the success of the program. Beyond this youth also learned that if they wanted things done their way, they needed to learn how to lobby for these ideas within the group. There were several strategies for facilitating this type of discussion, ranging from stating individual likes or dislikes about the program, having them complete a formal written evaluation, addressing a group issue that had arisen that day, or discussing how the program concepts relate to the outside world (transfer).

Reflection Time. Reflection time followed the group meeting as it shifted the focus from group evaluation and reflection to that of themselves. Here youth needed to reflect on how they performed that day with regard to the levels of responsibility. This was often difficult for youth and as the leader I needed to encourage them to be open and honest with themselves without passing judgment. Several evaluation methods were used (they will be discussed more in-depth) ranging from simple thumbs up or down reflection to writing responses in journals. Within the program, I used a variety of self-evaluation methods, beginning with simple (as youth were learning the program) and progressing to more involved methods over the program's course.

Sample Program

Focus: Responsibility. When planning the lesson for the evening, the group of leaders and I would decide what we wanted our focus for the lesson to be. This

provided some framework for us to structure the awareness talk, activity, group meeting, and reflective time.

Relational Time. We met as a group at Everyone's Space in the community. From there, we walked together for roughly 15 minutes to a nearby elementary school gym. As leaders, we used this time to chat with youth about life outside of the program. This proved to be the perfect time to establish trust with youth and gain insight into the issues they faced in their personal and social lives. Once we reached the gym, we took roughly 10 minutes for youth to get changed and have some free time with equipment. Youth and leaders would mingle together and play basketball, volleyball, catch, etc.

Awareness Talk. As a group we would then meet at centre court where we discussed the theme of the day (i.e. Responsibility). As leaders we tried to ask probing questions and get youth to expand on their ideas. Great care was taken to ensure that these did not become lectures, but true discussions. Example: What are you responsible for? (Personal- your body, mind, actions, reactions, Social- community/school/home, the environment, family (siblings), friends)

Physical Activity: Stones. The main physical activity was selected to try to highlight the theme of the day. As leaders, we attempted to embed the theme within the activity so that the lessons could essentially 'come alive' for youth through their participation. As a result, the games played provided leaders with teachable

moments to make the life skills being focused on relevant to the activities the youth were participating in.

For example, in the game Stones (a modified capture the flag game), youth had the opportunity to take on many roles. Some played offense, some defense, while others focused on freeing teammates from 'jail'. There were a number of responsibilities that needed to be filled by individual team members in order to determine team success. If youth learned to cover all of the responsibilities, they would be more successful, if not, they would struggle.

During the course of the game, leaders tried to give youth time to meet in order to modify and adapt their strategies. We would try to give them strategic refining cues in order to improve their strategies related to the theme of the day. For example, we might suggest that each team member takes responsibility for a certain task. This embedding of the life skill within the curriculum is essential to life skill education through physical activity.

Group Meeting: Responsibilities in the Game.

What were your Responsibilities in each role?

What would happen if someone didn't do what they were responsible for?

After the game was completed, we took time to debrief and reflect on it. Leaders would ask probing questions (such as those listed above) to get youth to think about how the team performed with regard to the theme of the day. We again tried to engage youth in meaningful discussion.

Reflection Time: Responsibilities in the Program and at Home

What things are you responsible for? Two within the program, three outside

Following the group discussion, we would ask youth a specific question related to that lesson's theme. Individually and anonymously, they would write their responses and submit them. This was intended to shift the focus from group reflection to personal reflection in relation to that lesson's life skill theme. Leaders could then review the responses and gain a general sense of where the group is at with regard to their understanding and grasp of the life skill.

Relational Time. As a group, we would walk back together to Everyone's Space. This extra relational time allowed leaders to address any issues that may have arisen during the program that evening. If we noticed any behaviour or social issues (acting out, withdrawing, etc), we could take the time to pull a youth aside and try to address it. Beyond this, it gave us extra time to get to know the teens and chat.

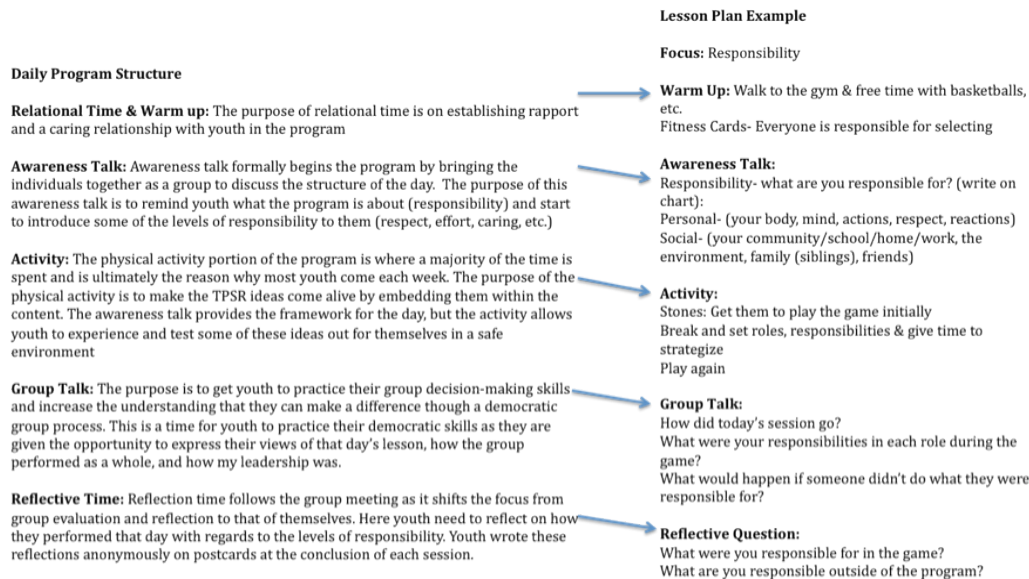


Figure 3.0. How each aspect of the program structure was represented in the actual lesson plan of the program

Unity Games Event

In addition to the weekly programming at the community centre, youth were also engaged in the Unity Games event toward the conclusion of the program. This event was run annually by the local university Physical Education department in collaboration with a variety of community youth organizations. I served as the coordinator for the event in both 2011 and 2012.

The Unity Games goal was to bring together underserved youth from around the community to engage in physical activity that sought to educate them on important life skills. Nearly one hundred youth from around the region came to the university to participate in a variety of physical activities and games run by university Physical Education undergraduate students. Each game sought to get the youth active and having fun while also addressing a critical life skill such as problem

solving, communication, etc. This year we also introduced an environmental education theme, educating youth on how they could be environmentally responsible in the community.

The focus of the Unity Games was similar to that of my own program. As a result, we sought to incorporate the after school program that I ran within the Unity Games. The youth that participated in the Unity Games were younger children from many of the local communities. Many of these children came from the same community that our after school program ran in. It was thought that, due to their familiarity with many of the children at the games, along with their positions as older youth in the community, the teens should take on a leadership role within the Unity Games event. In 2011, the teens within our program ran a physical activity during the games. In 2012, the teens chose to be group leaders, helping care for and guide younger children around during the event. In serving as leaders, youth showcased, practiced and learned life skills, specifically leadership. The Unity Games served as the culminating event for our own program as we progressively worked toward taking on a leadership role.

A Qualitative Approach to Studying the Program

To review, for this study, I was interested in understanding the program and how it influenced youths' life skill education experience. The three main research questions were:

- 1) How did youth experience life skill education within the program?

- 2) How did my role as program leader influence this experience with life skill education?
- 3) What aspects of the program facilitated this experience with life skill education?

Given the dynamic and often hectic environment that the program ran in, a controlled, experimental approach was unrealistic. As Hellison and Walsh would suggest, "...what passes for rigor may in fact restrict important evidence and alternative research designs" (2002 p. 295). By having to strictly adhere to an experimental design, the program may be completely useless in the attempt to develop life skills. Fortunately, there were several qualitative research methods that fit perfectly with the goals of this study and the program.

Michael Quinn-Patton, an expert with regard to qualitative methodology, would suggest that one of the major advantages to qualitative research design is the ability to adapt designs in response to new situations or knowledge gained. This allows the researcher to pursue new paths of discovery as they emerge (Patton, 2002). A more flexible qualitative approach was necessary and valuable for my design, allowing me to adjust and adapt my research needs in the same way I adjusted and adapted the program to meet the needs of the youth involved.

The relative youth of the life skills research field, required that a variety of research methods are necessary to advance the knowledge base when it comes to life skills education through physical activity. Gould and Carson (2008) go on to say that, "We know so little about life skills development through sport that describing the conditions and experiences of those involved is essential"(p. 72). Through a

qualitative approach, I could help contribute to this area through the detailed description of how life skills were facilitated within the program.

With regard to the program specifically, Patton suggested that humanistic programs often resist quantification because the numbers and standardization are seen as cold and impersonal (Patton, M. 2002). Further he suggests,

“The personal nature of qualitative inquiry derives from its openness, the evaluator’s close contact with the program, the procedures of observation and in-depth interviewing, particularly the latter, that communicate respect to the respondents by making their ideas and opinions (stated in their own terms) the important data source for the evaluation” (p. 175-176)

The emphasis on closeness with participants aligns itself with TPSR’s values of trust and rapport with individuals in the program. This close alignment between qualitative research and TPSR made it the ideal method for achieving the goals of this study.

Ethnographic Methods

When developing a research proposal, a researcher needs to select a framework with regard to the methods and measures being used. The purpose of the study was to examine how the program influenced youth’s life skill education and a major aspect of the program was the development of a positive environment. This positive environment could be referred to as a culture within the program. As a

result, the theoretical framework I selected to study the program was modified ethnographic methods.

Ethnography by definition, examines the culture of a given group through participant observation (Patton, 2002). Within youth programs, a huge contributor to the success of a program is the establishment of a positive culture. According to Patton (2002), “programs develop cultures... As such, the culture affects both the program processes and outcomes. Improving a program, then, may include changing the program’s culture” (p. 83). Further, Hellison & Walsh (2002) suggested that the processes involved within a youth program (e.g. experiencing a positive climate, a sense of belonging and safety, a caring adult) often contain some of the outcomes that program leaders want kids to take away with them. The purpose of this study was to shed light on the processes involved in the program that contributed to the acquisition of life skills. Each group develops a culture, therefore by examining this particular culture through the eyes of all those participating, it could be determined what actions and qualities of the individuals, environment and myself as the program leader/researcher helped facilitate this experience with life skills education. It should be noted that this study was not a true ethnography however; the strong influence of culture on the life skill education experience drove the decision to incorporate methods that are commonly used in ethnographic research. This approach allowed for an in depth look at the environment that developed within the program and how it influenced life skills education.

Sampling

Since I was interested in many of the processes involved in the development of life skills for each individual, each participant who volunteered to be part of the study within the program (including myself) was a unit of analysis. I wanted to understand how youth experienced these life skills from the perspective of each individual; therefore this was the most appropriate unit to study.

As Patton (2002) suggests, the focus of qualitative research is not on empirical generalization but on providing depth of understanding among information-rich cases. To feasibly achieve this depth of understanding, samples needed to be relatively small and selected purposefully. The focus was on selecting information rich cases that provided detail of the process of developing life skills through the program.

For this study, the program numbers were relatively small (roughly 8-10 youth). The program ran once a week on Wednesdays for 2 hours during the evening. The program was run on a drop-in basis, as youth could come and go as they pleased. Intensity sampling was used due to the relatively small number of participants in the program as I had the ability to use every participant as a data set. According to Patton, intensity sampling involves participants who manifest the phenomenon under study intensely. With respect to my program, each individual in the program manifested the phenomenon intensely as they were all participating in this life skills development program. As a result, each individual in the program could be used as a data set.

Due to the drop-in nature of the program, regular attendance was beneficial for an individual's understanding of the program that we have established.

Therefore, for a youth's insights regarding the program to be accurate, significant exposure through participation in the majority of sessions was required. However, if an outlying youth attended sporadically, yet was still able to grasp and understand the program than it must be well established. Therefore, I chose not to exclude the data collected from such youth as it still provided rich insight into the programs from a unique perspective.

Participants

The following table provides a description of the youth and leaders in the program. The names used are pseudonyms selected by participants themselves or assigned by myself the researcher. These names were used throughout the data to provide reference and insight into the personalities of each participant and their individual contributions to the development of the program. The details associated with each pseudonym provided thicker description of each group member and their background. It was important to know the background of each member of the program as this background influenced our personalities and behaviours and thus impacted the development of the program.

A unique aspect of this study was that the majority of the youth participating in the program were African-Canadian, mainly coming from Sudanese background. Further, most youth were part of families that practiced the Islamic faith. These two attributes classify youth as minorities within the region. However, within the

program, these youth represented the vast majority. Each member of the program brought a unique perspective to the group that influenced the program's development. The different ethnic and cultural backgrounds of our group created a unique dynamic that played out over the course of the program's duration. This dynamic is represented in the following chart and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Tariq	16	M	10	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic	1 year	Sometimes
					Youth			
Name	Age	Sex	Grade	Ethnicity	First Language	Second Language	Experience in the Program	Attendance
Galiana	17	F	11	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic	2 years	Always
Dalia	16	F	10	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic	2 years	(Always, Sometimes, Rarely)
Rachel	19	F	12	Congolese-Canadian	French	English	1 year	Always
Amal	19	F	11 Year College	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic	2 years	Always
Badra	18	F	10 Year College	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic	2 years	Sometimes
Mahd	18	M	9	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic, French	2 months	Always

Usain	13	M	8	Jamaican-Canadian	English		4 months	Sometimes
Simon	13	M	8	Canadian	English		4 months	Sometimes
Mahdi	18	M	12	Sudanese-Canadian	English	Arabic, French	1 year	Rarely
Leaders								
Wayne	26	M	2 nd Year MA	Canadian	English		2 Years	Always
Rodger	25	F	1 st Year MA	Canadian	English	French	1 Year	Sometimes
Frank	23	M	4 th Year Uni	Canadian	English		4 Months (Winter)	Always
Judith	24	F	4 th Year Uni	Canadian	English		4 Months (Winter)	Always
Kristen	23	F	4 th Year Uni	Canadian	English		4 Months (Fall)	Always
Shaniqua	22	F	4 th Year Uni	Canadian	English		2 months (Winter)	Sometimes
Latoya	22	F	4 th Year Uni	Canadian	English		2 months (Winter)	Sometimes

Table 3.0 Participant Information

Data Collection

A traditional ethnographic approach to data collection has involved immersion in a particular culture while simultaneously maintaining some level of detachment from it (Patton, 2002). For example, Malanowsky's Stranger is the idea that an outsider to a particular culture often notices aspects of it that are oblivious to insiders (Patton, 2002). Due to my role as program leader, I was both an insider and outsider, leading to challenges with regard to data collection. Therefore I had to take a participant observer approach, being fully engaged while observing and talking to participants at the same time. I considered myself an insider within the culture of the program as I played an active role in its establishment and maintenance. As a result, my perspective and reflection upon it was important with regard to answering my research questions. However, with regard to the culture of the youth within the program, my age, ethnicity and role as program leader left me as an outsider. Therefore it was important that I took steps to understand youths' unique perspective on the program and how this influenced their life skill education.

The traditional ethnographic approach to research can lead to a strictly etic point of view where the researcher (me) is considered an outsider and “studies” the culture with a high level of detachment (Patton, 2002). Due to my close relationships with program participants and the development of the program itself, this level of detachment was impossible. Further, this etic approach had the potential to alienate me as the researcher from the youth being studied due to the power dynamic that can develop. In other words, having a researcher study you or your group can be an uncomfortable feeling if you do not understand the work being done. Worse, the impression that I, as the researcher, was somehow ‘above’ those being studied could have developed. This is something that was avoided at all costs. Therefore, I needed to enlist the use of specific data collection and analyses strategies that were based upon empowerment of the research participant within the research process.

Within my research study, I sought to reduce the power dynamic between myself as the researcher, and the individuals being studied. As Rahman (1993) suggested,

“Research on oppressed people by external researchers perpetuates the myth of the incapability of people to participate in the research as equals which alienates them from their own power of generating knowledge relevant for transforming their own environment” (p. 89).

The youth within the program, due to their roles as youth and also as minorities, may have found themselves in a lesser position of these power dynamics. Within traditional educational settings, a power dynamic often exists where teachers possess the authority and power while students must do as they are told (Oyler,

1996). A major element of the TPSR approach is empowerment of learners through a gradual shift of control from teacher to learner (Hellison, 2011). I sought to find unique ways to empower youth within the entire research process specifically through the data collection and analysis portions. By utilizing various unique data collection and analysis techniques, I empowered the youth of the program to truly engage in the research process.

Since I was already considered an outsider due to my background (an adult, white, relatively privileged male university student) I wanted to avoid further alienation as “a researcher”. For many of these youth, university seemed like a difficult and unrealistic goal (despite my efforts to refute this). That being said, the idea of a researcher studying them may have seemed uncomfortable. They had little exposure to academic research; therefore they may have felt overwhelmed or lacked understanding. From my experience working with these kids, I knew how intelligent they were and wanted to convey the value of their participation in the research process at every turn. Rather than me doing research on them, the youth were involved along the way. It was my hope that this would empower them but also allow them to realize that research was not beyond their capabilities.

Methods

In order to better understand the development of the program and how this influenced life skill education, I needed to gain insight into my own views as well as those of the other leaders and youth participants. In order to understand these perspectives, I relied on my close contact with all aspects of the program as well as a

variety of methods for data collection. I enlisted my own reflective journal, self-reports from youth, as well as interviews with those involved to shed light on the program culture. Further, as Patton (2002) suggests, the use of triangulation strengthens a study through the combination of methods as each method reveals different aspects of the phenomenon being examined. The use of multiple data sources within the same study helped me understand the program and its influence from multiple perspectives other than my own. This way, a more truthful representation of the program could be determined.

For the youth self-reports, the TPSR literature suggested a variety of methods that could be used. During the initial weeks of the program, I used less-involved processes as youth began to develop their critical evaluation skills. Such informal forms of evaluation were a simple thumbs up/down for their likes/dislikes or a show of hands. As I began to gain rapport with youth and they became more competent in their evaluation skills, I moved to more involved forms of data collection such as written responses.

I attempted to present data collection strategies to the youth through a variety of creative mediums. The first medium was utilizing their cell phones in the form of text messaging. The youth were constantly connected to their friends and families through their phones. The use of text messaging was very prevalent within the program as youth wanted to always be in contact with those they care for. I was of the thinking that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, leading to the incorporation of text messaging within the data collection process. Rather than write reflections, youth could send text messages to my own phone that responded to a given question. For

example, early in the program I asked them to send me 5 words that they felt related to leadership. These responses were then collected, compiled and dated within a document. It was hoped that the use of technology specifically their cell phones, would help engage youth within the process. Although I could not guarantee anonymity, in order to keep the responses confidential, none of the cell phone numbers were known by myself, or any of the leaders. After the responses were compiled within a separate document, they were deleted permanently off the phone within 24 hours of receipt.

For those youth without cell phones, I utilized the use of postcards in order to collect their thoughts and feelings. Youth selected a postcard with an image that reflected their thoughts, feelings, or events within the program that day. They then responded to the question asked (ex. 5 words that they felt related to leadership) on the postcard and dropped it in the “mailbox” that I brought each week. I compiled these answers and added them to the text message responses in order to have a collection of thoughts and feelings from the entire group.

I took great care in ensuring that youth understood their role in this data collection was valued and sought after. I needed to make sure that the data collection process felt natural and genuine. They also needed to be assured that truthful responses to these questions were important in order to help them improve, but also for data collection purposes. Care needed to be taken to ensure that youth felt safe commenting openly within the setting.

Apart from the youth responses, I completed daily journal reflections and observations following each session to provide insight on how the aspects of the

program influenced the life skill education of the youth. I played a significant role in the development of the program; therefore I took great care in chronicling my perspective of how everything transpired during the process. These journal entries provided a significant data set for analysis but also aided in giving me perspective with regard to my research reflexivity.

Finally focus group interviews following the conclusion of the program helped to provide an in-depth overall perspective of the program from those involved. As Patton suggests, the purpose of a focus-group interview is to collect data within a social context where people can reflect and build upon their own and others responses (Patton, 2002). I was interested in understanding how youth viewed the program retrospectively. Based on this information, I conducted focus group interviews following the conclusion of the program, allowing participants to reflect on the experience they had and how it was represented within their consciousness. I was fearful that a formal interview process would seem overwhelming and uncomfortable for these kids. The benefit of a focus group was that it could be an enjoyable process for those participating as they could be social with others participating (Patton, 2002). This social aspect is a human tendency and helped keep the youth at ease and better ensure that the data was authentic. Beyond this, the interaction between participants helped enhance the quality of the data as they could give group consensus (Patton, 2002). Allowing the youth to discuss aspects of the program openly helped them to realize similar views that were shared with the rest of the group. This helped to present a better picture of the

shared perspectives of the program. The focus group interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

As with all types of data collection, there were limitations to using focus group interviews as a form of data collection. One such limitation was that the number of questions that could be asked was restricted due to the larger number of respondents (Patton, 2002). Focus groups are typically for groups of 6-10 and last for one or two hours (Patton, 2002).

For this study, timing was a bit of an issue as the focus group had to occur during one of our weekly sessions. Some youth did not want to miss out on the regular activities and chose not to participate. The youth really enjoyed being active so it was difficult to run more than one focus group interview and also have at least six participants.

In the end, four female participants participated in one focus group interview of about a half hour. These participants represented a range of experience with the program. One female (age 14) had recently joined the program, another (age 16) was originally one of the more difficult youth but had matured greatly during the year, the final two participants (both age 19) were the eldest of the group and showed a great deal of leadership. Despite, only having one interview and four participants, these youth gave considerable insight into the program and their experience within it.

Facilitating a focus group interview required considerable experience in order to manage the group, keeping it focused and moving forward (Patton, 2002). I continually practiced my group interview skills throughout the Group Discussions

following the activities each day. In my past educational experiences, I gained skill and grew comfortable asking probing questions to the groups I am educating. By further practicing my group interview skills I became better experienced in asking specific and skilled questions that revealed useful data.

Perhaps one of the most crucial limitations to focus groups was that individuals would not feel comfortable expressing themselves within a social setting (Patton, 2002). There were a few strategies that I used in order to combat this feeling. Throughout the program youth had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the group meeting setting. By the end of the program, most felt comfortable in this type of environment. When it came time to conduct the interview, youth had the option of participating. This ensured they were comfortable during the process. Patton suggests that a disadvantage to focus groups is that they typically occur outside of natural settings for the participants (Patton, 2002). This situation was reduced by holding the interview in the same setting as the weekly Group Discussions (in the gym during the program). I began the focus group session with a few general ideas to discuss however from there, it was up to the youth to control the conversation. This approach empowered students to steer the conversation in the directions that were important to them, rather than having me do the steering for them. As a result, I uncovered some of the common themes, ideas and skills that youth felt they learned through their participation.

Beyond this, if they still felt uncomfortable sharing their views and opinions, I put forth the option for students to engage me one-on-one to discuss any of these ideas further. This was a successful approach used by van Ingen (2011), when

examining the use of a boxing program to promote empowerment among female survivors of violence. It was hoped that youth, when given the opportunity to talk one-on-one, would pursue discussion around the life skills concepts that were particularly relevant within their lives. These discussions normally occurred informally preventing me from recording them exactly. Following the discussion, I recorded the main points and issues that were brought up as part of my reflective journal. In this regard, I gained valuable personal input regarding some of the more pressing ideas touched on within the program without making youth feel uncomfortable.

By empowering youth to steer the conversations toward the ideas and issues that are most important to them, it helped the research being collected, and also allowed me to adjust the program to address the life skills, issues or ideas that are most meaningful and relevant for these kids. In doing so, I could create a program that better served them.

Beyond these interviews I will be continuously collecting data from my own reflective journals as well as the self-reflections that the youth participated in throughout the program. It is hoped that the use of these multiple methods of data collection will help to enhance the credibility of the data through triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance was granted on November 23, 2011 (File #11-089-MANDIGO). This clearance granted the use of journals, personal correspondence,

focus groups and the use of audiotaping for data collection. Unique to this study, ethics also included the use of text messaging during the data collection process. These data collection strategies along with how the issue of confidentiality was handled during this process will be described in the following sections. As for the presentation of the results and use of names within this study, all participants and members of the program (including leaders) have been given pseudonyms. This allowed the ability to identify comments and the involvement of specific youth in program events without jeopardizing their privacy.

Data Analysis

In terms of qualitative analysis of the data I collected, I was again focused on finding ways to empower youth within the process. I was more interested in achieving depth over breadth of knowledge. I wanted to understand how members understood and perceived the program and how this reflected the experience with life skills. To achieve this, several levels of analysis of the self-evaluations, journal entries, and interviews needed to be undertaken.

In an attempt to empower youth in the analysis process I utilized their feedback and reflection throughout the data collection process. Each week the youth responded to a question during our discussion (ie. 5 words that they felt related to leadership) via postcard or text message. I compiled all of these responses and used the Wordle online resource to present them. Wordle takes any document or group of words and identifies the most common words used. It then presented these in a 'word cloud' where all of the most common words used were shown together in a

thoughts or ideas as the researcher.

Upon the conclusion of data collection, there were a total of eighteen journal entries, eleven sets of student responses, and one focus group interview. For all data collected, I performed an initial read through in order to see if any strong themes or information jumped out at me.

Following this, each data set was input into the Dedoose program, a qualitative research tool designed to help code and analyze data. The next level of analysis was to read through and look for any existential categories (ex. people, places, objects, happenings) and idiomatic expressions that were common throughout the data (Patton, 2002). Following the initial individual-case analysis, I did a cross-case analysis to look for general similarities and differences within the data to see if any general patterns emerged. The Dedoose program allowed me to easily pull excerpts from the data, assign multiple themes to each, and easily group them together visually. This provided a fantastic tool to help assign and group all of the various themes that emerged into larger umbrella themes.

The reason for using existential categories was to identify certain people, objects or happenings that were common to occurrences within the interviews, reflections and self-evaluations. This helped me to understand how each individual viewed the same aspect of the program, allowing me to understand how the group as a whole viewed it. The reason for using idiomatic expressions was to find common language and observations that each individual had within the program. In doing so, common perspectives with regard to the program and the experience of life skills could be identified. This helped me to identify common themes that could

be discussed further within our group discussions and also the focus-group interview.

The analysis process for this study was initially deductive in nature. When exploring the data, I was looking for specific information that related to my research questions. I looked for examples of life skills, pedagogy, and aspects of the program that contributed to the life skill education experience. These examples were then grouped into major themes and subthemes. Beyond this, the theme of lessons learned emerged inductively from the data and deserved to be examined further.

Trustworthiness

To increase trustworthiness, I used as much triangulation as possible within my design. I used multiple types of data collection and interviews. Providing an opportunity for youth to reflect and confirm their responses to the questions each week provides a form of member-checking that further increases the credibility of the study.

My role as program leader put me in a position to better understand what the youth were experiencing within the program. However, my role as an adult did not allow me the same insider's perspective with regard to "kid culture". Therefore special care needed to be taken when interpreting data from my "outsider" perspective.

Beyond this, my involvement with youth prior to the interview process allowed me to establish rapport and a relationship with them quickly. This helped

them feel more comfortable with sharing their insights and feelings during the data collection process, providing information that was closer to the lived experience.

When it comes to dealing with bias, within research, bias is unavoidable. Patton states, that complete objectivity is impossible and complete subjectivity undermines the credibility of the study. Therefore the researcher seeks balance by attempting to understand and present the world as authentically as they can while remaining consciously self-analytical and aware of their biases (Patton, 2002). Instead of fighting it, researchers need to be aware of biases and state them explicitly. An important part of being aware of your biases is self-analysis and reflexivity. For this reason, I chose to incorporate a reflexive journal during the data collection and analysis to better understand how I viewed the process of inquiry. The inclusion of this journal work helped in understanding my own biases and interpretations of the data thus bringing more credibility to the study.

It was important for myself as the researcher to always be aware of and seek to understand the social, historical, and temporal context that this program and subsequent data analysis took place in. Since I was dealing with racialized youth culture that I was not a part of, I needed to be especially cautious when looking to transfer my findings to new scenarios. For this reason, I relied on my data collection to help engage youth in the research process, having their voice expressed authentically. Patton suggests, a qualitative analyst needs to own and be reflective of their voice and perspective (Patton, M. 2002). Throughout the research process and as a part of the TPSR model, reflection was key. I needed to constantly be aware of and express my own personal interpretations and biases toward the program. In

this regard, I incorporated my interpretations throughout the collection and presentation of the findings.

As further effort to increase the trustworthiness of this study, an alternate coder was used to provide a different perspective of on the data set. The alternate coder was given a total of fifteen excerpts representing roughly 15% of the total number of excerpts. The coder was then given the specific codes that arose for me when I analyzed the data. Using my specific codes, the alternate coder was asked to read through the excerpts and assign whichever codes she saw fit. The alternate coding was compared to my own to find any similarities and differences. This comparison was done to ensure there were no major discrepancies.

Chapter 4: Results

A wide range of common themes emerged from the thematic analysis. This wide range seemed to fall into four overarching or umbrella themes; Group Culture, Leader Pedagogy, Life Skills, and Lessons Learned. Within each of these umbrella themes, several sub themes are present. These will be presented here in the Results section and the relation to my research question will be discussed further within the Discussion chapter.

It should be noted that a majority of the excerpts fall under several themes and subthemes, so there will be some degree of overlap between them.

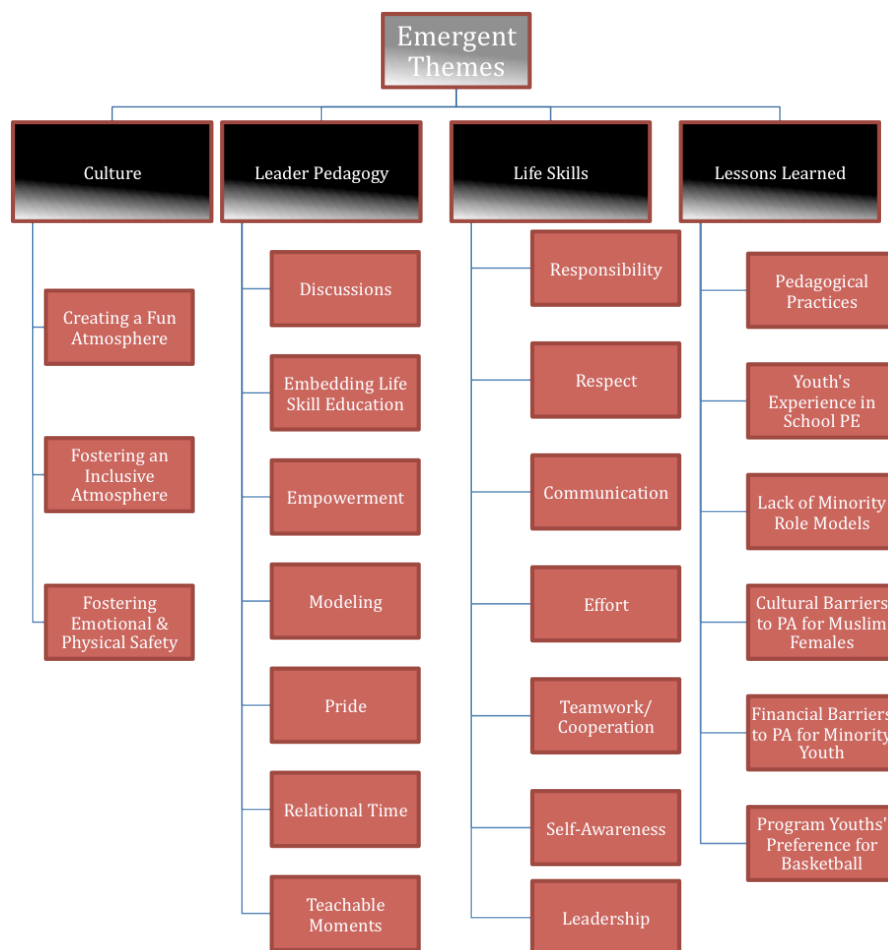


Figure 4.0 Major Themes that Emerged

After compiling the data and separating it into the themes and subthemes, I looked to see which data set the excerpts came from. The following table is a visual representation of where each of the subthemes arose within the data.

Theme/ Subtheme	Data Set		
	Reflective Journal	Youth Responses	Interview
Culture			
Fostering a Fun Atmosphere	✓		✓
Fostering an Inclusive Atmosphere	✓		
Fostering Emotional and Physical Safety	✓		
Leader Pedagogy			
Discussions	✓		✓
Embedding Life Skill Education	✓		
Empowerment	✓		✓
Modeling	✓		✓
Pride	✓		
Relational Time	✓		✓
Teachable Moments	✓		
Life Skills			
Responsibility	✓	✓	✓
Respect	✓	✓	✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓
Effort	✓	✓	✓
Teamwork/Cooperation	✓	✓	✓
Self-Awareness	✓		

Leadership	✓	✓	✓
Lessons Learned			
Pedagogical Practices	✓		✓
Youth experience in school PE	✓		✓
Lack of Minority Role Models	✓		
Financial Barriers to PE for Minority Youth	✓		
Cultural Barriers to PA for Muslim Females	✓		
Program Youths' Preference for Basketball	✓		

Table 4.0 Themes within the Data Set

It is interesting to note how each of the themes/subthemes is represented within the data as it visually demonstrates saturation of the themes within the data. With regard to where the data is coming from, the source is not just my own, but a combination of my own thoughts within the reflective journal and the responses of the youth within the program. It is clear to see that the youth are clearly making the connections with regard to the life skills and concepts being demonstrated within the program.

The following are specific excerpts pulled from the data to represent each theme/subtheme. The excerpts are what I deemed to be excellent examples with regard to each category. An attempt to provide context has been made for each excerpt to provide a better understanding of the setting, youth, and program.

Major Theme: Culture

I will begin with the first theme of Group Culture. This major theme includes all data that referred to the establishment of a positive and safe learning environment for youth in the program. Three subthemes emerged within this group including; Creating a Fun Atmosphere, Fostering an Inclusive Atmosphere and Fostering Emotional and Physical Safety. The following are excerpts from the data set that highlight each of these subthemes.

Culture Subtheme: Fostering a Fun Atmosphere. Throughout the data, there are excerpts that reflect the efforts that were made in order to make the program environment positive, fun and enjoyable for youth. Many excerpts revolve around the activities or games that were played within the program. Excerpts also highlighted specific interactions between leaders and youth that helped create a positive environment and influence the personal enjoyment of the program for youth.

Many of the teens couldn't jump high enough to dunk but it was interesting when I asked one of the taller girls, to give it a try. She was all for it but struggled at first because this is something she has never tried before. It was interesting to work with her to progressively get her to master the skill. We first tried running and jumping with no ball, hanging on the rim, then getting her wrists above the rim and finally trying with the ball. After many failed attempts, I was impressed with her ability to stick with it, she was so close! Finally, she rose up, dunked the ball and even hung on the rim afterwards! I was so pumped I yelled out and

threw my hands up. You could tell she was so excited to have achieved something she had never tried before. She was beaming for the rest of the night and it was so nice to see the positive impact a simple success like that can have on a youth's self esteem. We joked that she is the first girl we have ever seen dunk while wearing a hijab! (Leader's Reflective Journal)

To provide some context, the youth that participated in the program typically did not participate in organized sport. A few played on their school sports teams (one plays varsity basketball in college), but this was not common. Culturally, many of the families that these youth came from did not put much emphasis on participation in organized sport. There also exist barriers to sport with regard to language and financial access. As immigrants, families lacked knowledge on how to enroll youth in organized sport. Some parents of these youth were not proficient in English, further preventing them from accessing youth sport. Compounding all of this, certain families financially could not afford to enroll youth in these types of activities. Due to all of these factors, organized sport was seen as more of a luxury than a necessity.

As a result, youth were not exposed to many formal sports and tended to prefer informal active games. However basketball was the exception, as most youth preferred to pick up a ball and shoot around whenever we had free time. Basketball was the most popular sport amongst youth in the community and there were always boys playing pick-up ball on the outdoor court when we arrived each week. It was quite popular amongst the boys of the community. However, many of the girls did not get the opportunity to participate with the

boys and would rarely enter the courts to play. This was an additional barrier for girls wanting to participate in basketball. Contrary to this, at the gym where we ran the program, there were lots of basketballs for everyone and an abundance of height adjustable baskets. The girls often had their own space and equipment to play individually or with a partner. Having adjustable baskets provided opportunities to adjust the difficulty of the task allowing youth to achieve success on a height that suited their ability. Beyond this, the opportunity to dunk a basketball was something many of these youth, especially the girls, had never accomplished. The goal was to remove barriers to participation and allow youth to experience success. Youth were given the opportunity to participate in activities that were sometimes denied to them due to certain societal barriers. As a result of these opportunities and successes, youth felt positively about themselves, enjoyed the program, and had fun.

Excerpts from the youth explicitly stated that one of the strong motivators for them to attend the program was to have fun with their friends within the activities.

“Cause we like it here so we want to show it.” (Badra)

“Well here we get to have fun, school you have to like pay attention.” (Dalia)

“Here you have more freedom. Like here you’re more comfortable, with the people you are around and cause you get to choose.” (Amal)

-Interview Responses

Youth often expressed that they enjoyed the program because they had freedom within it. Compared to their school lives where they are often told what to

do, in the program they were always given choice. These excerpts are reflective of the general attitude toward the program and why youth felt it was fun to come each week. The atmosphere at the program was much different than the experience these youth had at school. The freedom of choice within the program seemed to be a huge motivator for youth to participate. They chose to attend, the activities we engaged in, and had influence on many other aspects of the program. This choice allowed them to control their own learning and increased enjoyment. Beyond this, most of the youth knew each other well outside of the program. For many newly immigrated families, there was a strong sense of belonging in the housing community where our program drew from. A large portion of the community was Sudanese-Canadian with very strong ties between families. For many newly immigrated families, the mutual support that this network of families provided was vital to the successful integration of new immigrants into the region. A strong sense of support could be noticed amongst the families of the youth in the program. All of their families knew each other, depended on each other, and faced the same issues as newly landed immigrants in Canada. A strong culture of support and acceptance was established within the community. As a result, all of the youth in the program knew each other and their families. There were several siblings in the program and often siblings would attend our program if one of the teens needed to care for them. The close-knit and supportive culture of the broader community was transferred and encouraged within our program. This helped to create an atmosphere where youth were comfortable and able to enjoy the experience fully.

Culture Subtheme: Fostering an Inclusive Atmosphere. Several excerpts highlighted the ability of the youth to welcome new people to the program with open arms, making them feel comfortable and included easily. The youth also showed the ability to welcome new ideas from members of the group.

It is interesting to see how a new youth responds to entering the group culture that has already been established. Judging by the response, she felt comfortable very quickly and responded by getting active and engaged within the games. She was also helped along by some of the other youth that explained some of the activities that we do that weren't so clear (such as the reflective questions I pose at the end). It was nice to see how seamlessly a new addition was welcomed and integrated within our program. She was comfortable with the other youth, but also chatting with us as leaders too. This comfort is reflective of the welcoming and positive atmosphere that we have successfully accomplished within the program. The leaders and I made a point to thank her for coming out and say that it was nice to have her there. We also tried to encourage her to come from now on. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

The youth spoken about was Jada who joined our program toward the end of the year for a couple of months. She was a friend of a few of the girls who were regulars in the program. These girls helped to ease her transition into the program and make sure that she was included. As leader's we also made an effort to include her as well. She was integrated quickly into the group and continued to attend for the remainder of the program. Jada was a part of the broader Sudanese community and already had a level of comfort with some of the other girls in the

program. The culture of acceptance and support that had transferred from the broader community and firmly established within our program was evidenced in situations like this.

Culture Subtheme: Fostering Emotional and Physical Safety. Several excerpts highlighted the comfort that youth felt within the program. The youth often felt that they could express themselves within the program without feeling judged or embarrassed.

One of the nicest compliments that I have received concerning the program came from a side remark that one youth made as we chatted. We were talking about people being chatty or quiet and she said, "At school I never talk, usually at home I don't either, I'm always quiet. I'm only really comfortable talking here". I don't think she realized it, but this little comment is the reason why I do what I am doing. This speaks volumes to the inclusive and welcoming culture that has developed within the program. Youth feel as though they are safe to express themselves in our program. This is one of the best compliments a program leader could ask for. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

It was Amal that spoke these kind words after one of our sessions. As one of the eldest youth, she had been participating in after school programming for years. She truly enjoyed participating in the program and rarely missed a session during the two-year period we were there. Her enthusiasm was contagious and she was the driving force in encouraging other girls to participate each week. Despite beginning college this year, she continued to participate each week and was hired as a leader

by the community organization to help run programs for younger children a few times a week. After school programs in the community, especially our program had become an important part of her life, a place where she could be herself and was accepted. These programs were a place for youth to express themselves and explore new opportunities outside of their home and school lives. This emotional and physical safety was a crucial aspect of our program.

Excerpts showed the efforts that were made by the leaders of the program to foster an environment where youth felt safe to express themselves, struggle through adversity, and eventually succeed.

The program atmosphere needs to be one where youth feel safe to struggle and work through these types of issues for themselves without feeling negative about themselves. I think we have done a great job of creating this type of environment and this moment is a testament to that. Eventually, the youth figured it out without our help and the game ran wonderfully. I was really proud of the group tonight. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

To provide some context, we would often try team-building activities to challenge youth with regard to certain life skills. Youth often struggled during these activities and would want to quit. Youth were used to giving up when things got difficult. As leaders, we worked to encourage youth to stay motivated and positive. We tried to avoid rescuing them when they struggled, allowing them to fight through adversity in order to achieve success. Youth struggled through adversity in a supportive and safe atmosphere. They were encouraged to continue when frustrated and eventually achieved success through efforts all their own. Within the

school environment, many youth were used to being given the answer and struggled to show the patience and perseverance necessary to complete these tasks. We made an effort to provide an environment where they could be supported by peers and leaders through this struggle.

Major Theme: Leader Pedagogy

The major theme of Leader Pedagogy refers to the efforts, activity and interactions that the program leaders (including myself) had while running the program. These efforts, activities, and interactions were designed specifically with sound pedagogical practices in mind. These excerpts highlight how leaders attempted to create the type of positive learning environment where life skill education could take place. A multitude of subthemes were present within the data including; Discussion, Embedding Life Skill Education, Empowerment, Modeling, Pride, Relational Time, and Teachable Moments.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Discussions. Discussions were an integral part of the life skill education aspect of the program and this is evidenced by the frequency in which the theme of discussions occurs within the data. Discussions were used as a major teaching tool within the program. Excerpts showed that the discussions held at the beginning of each session, during the Awareness Talk portion, often provided the focus for the evening. They were used in an attempt to highlight the focus and set the tone for the program.

We started with a general discussion about how they could be a leader and what being a leader meant to them. We tried to highlight the importance of the youth acting as good role models for the younger kids in their communities. I think that this was something tangible that they could understand clearly with regard to being a leader. By acting respectful, getting involved and encouraging youth through their words and actions, they can help make the Unity Games a success and help the kids enjoy it. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

This discussion occurred during an Awareness Talk during a session focused on leadership. Through discussion with youth, we came to a group consensus on what it meant to be a leader and how they can show leadership skills. By developing this shared understanding with concrete examples, youth showcased what they already knew about leadership, gained a better idea of what leadership was, and the steps they could take to become one. These types of discussions were important for the life skill education experience.

Brief discussions were held during the games as a chance to clarify rules, voice concerns, change the activity, or highlight a life skill. Discussions were an opportunity for youth to express their ideas and practice a democratic type of decision-making process.

As a group, we discussed the rules of the game to ensure everyone was on the same page and that it remained respectful and fun for all. I was really pleased with how engaged the group was with this discussion. I encouraged them to come up with their own rules and regulations for the game which they embraced

very well. This opportunity to be empowered within the game was reflected in the kids' motivation to play and engage. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

To put this into context, youth really struggled with these types of discussions initially. Many youth experienced one-way communication at home or at school, where a person in authority told them what to do and they were expected to do it. Youth were not used to being asked for their opinion or feedback initially. As they grew accustomed to it, they truly enjoyed being able to express themselves and discuss any issues that arose in order to achieve group consensus. The group became skilled at recognizing issues, expressing them, having a group discussion, and finally coming to a group consensus.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Embedding Life Skill Education. The theme of Embedding Life Skills arose throughout the data. Program leaders attempted to embed a life skill education curriculum within the activities each night. The attempt to create activities that allow youth to challenge or practice life skills was evidenced in many excerpts. These excerpts referred to the care taken to plan lessons and specific activities chosen that were intended to aid in this type of education.

We then did our warm up and introduced the first task called Gutter ball. This is a teamwork task, where the group has to get a ball from one end of the gym to the other using sheets of paper. We challenged the group to think creatively to come up with strategies. They were successful on their first trial with a little bit of guidance from myself and another leader to get them organized. We then challenged them to beat their time and stepped back to let them organize

themselves. It was a bit of chaos as everyone spoke at once, paid little attention, etc. This led to a few failed attempts and some frustration. As time went on things continued to go sour but we as leaders had to restrain ourselves from intervening (sometimes you have to let the group struggle in order to find a solution). Finally after a few failed attempts, we brought the group together for a discussion about the concept of teamwork and how everyone has a responsibility within the group and has to ensure that they are listening and communicating effectively. The task should have taken roughly 10-15 minutes but chewed up nearly 45 mins. I think it was a good teachable moment for the group. This proved to be a great teachable moment for us and the youth seemed to be able to relate their struggles to the need to be more effective in their communication skills. We will continue to draw upon this experience in future weeks. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

Youth tended to struggle with communication particularly. Youth were used to conversations that occurred rapidly often with more than one person speaking at a time. Often the most dominant speaker is the loudest. When working in a team setting, this often resulted in poor performances in the tasks given. Beyond this, as youth of varying ages, they all had different levels of experience in a team setting. When introduced to this activity, youth originally struggled with everyone talking at once, using different strategies, and getting frustrated. As they struggled, leaders encouraged them to work together and organize themselves. Eventually, older youth took leadership roles, communication improved, and the group achieved the goal. This activity was a

very eye opening experience for many youth with regard to their communication and teamwork skills.

The youth suggested the effectiveness of the life skill education when it was embedded within the activities we engaged in.

“Sometimes it doesn’t even feel like we are learning it at the time. Like it just comes naturally. Like in the game, you don’t tell us, “Oh we are learning this. Or be prepared because we are learning this.” But at the end of the games you will ask us “okay so what have you learned?” and we will tell you what we learned like leadership. We didn’t know that we were learning that until you told us.”

(Amal)

-Interview Response

To put this comment into context, Amal as one of the oldest youth in the program, possessed a great deal of insight into the delivery of the program. She worked as a program leader for the community organization at Everyone’s Space and as a result, she could understand how we tried to embed the life skills within the activities we participated in each session. For life skill education to “come naturally”, a great deal of effort had to be put in by the program leaders. As an older youth with lots of experience in the program, Amal was able to notice these subtle pedagogical strategies. This excerpt was reflective of leaders’ ability to successfully embed life skills education into the activities we participated in.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Empowerment. A common pedagogical practice that arose within the data was Empowerment. Leaders made a conscious effort to give

youth opportunities to take control of their own learning. The effort to empower youth within the program setting often resulted in positive experiences for all involved. In the following excerpt, youth were given the chance to create games and lead their peers through them. This was one of the first steps in empowering the group as a whole to take on a leadership role within the program.

The games were fantastic and you got the impression that the youth really enjoyed having the extra responsibility. When I asked them about it afterwards, youth all said they loved being able to control what they played and welcomed the opportunity to do so in the future. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

In this excerpt, youth were just given the opportunity to create and lead an activity for their peers during one of the sessions. From observations and discussions with the youth it seemed that within their typical school settings, youth did not receive the opportunity to showcase their leadership skills as often as they did within the program. When they were given the opportunity to take a leadership role and control their learning, they truly enjoyed it and were highly motivated within the activity.

The effort to empower youth contributed significantly to the establishment of a positive learning environment for both leaders and youth. It allowed mutual respect to be fostered within the group. This is echoed in excerpts from both groups.

I've noticed that this has helped to bridge the divide between some youth and leaders. Judging by their general demeanor and conversations, I felt some youth remained distant and guarded toward myself, and some of the other leaders

despite all of our work previously to establish rapport. It has seemed that with the increase in empowerment, this youth has opened up a little bit. The general demeanor and attitude of this youth seems to have softened as she understands that her voice and opinion is valued and that she can have a say in what we do at the program. Amongst the group in general, the group (leaders included) seems to have grown closer and had more fun as we have tried to remove the hierarchy that often establishes itself between youth and leaders/teachers. This work has made me very proud as a program leader and is something I will continue to incorporate more and more as there youth grow within the program. (Leader Reflective Journal)

Again to contextualize this excerpt, it concerns Dalia who has matured considerably over the course of this program. When the program first began, Dalia kept her distance from the leaders of the program. She was close to a couple of girls in the group however she seemed to distrust the leaders. Early in the program she rarely listened and acted disruptively. However as the program progressed, she began to embrace the discussions and buy into the program. I noticed that when she was given the opportunity to be empowered, she responded positively and enjoyed offering her suggestions. As we continually encouraged her to contribute to the program through her thoughts and ideas, she began to open up to us as leaders. She began to joke and connect with us. As a result, she became more relaxed within the program setting. The ability to empower youth within the program showed that we respected and valued their individual viewpoints. In Dalia's case, this was something she was not accustomed to having those in authority do. This could have been the

basis for her distrust initially. As time progressed, leader's gained rapport and established trusting relationships, allowing her to embrace the program and us more willingly.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Modeling. The excerpts within this subtheme refer to the attempt to expose youth to a variety of positive role models that can provide an example of how to conduct themselves. These opportunities came in many forms. Initially, program leaders provided a positive role model for youth.

"You guys show more teamwork and stuff than we would show ourselves. Like you will be like "here is the ball and go play a game", like you are sharing with us. Usually when we get the ball we are like "Yeah! Yeah! Let's go play," and we don't pass, but you guys pass more often than all of us. And we start to learn that maybe we should start passing because they are passing. Say if we are playing basketball and we aren't passing, one of you will yell out "Pass! Pass!" and remind us because now that you guys have taught us about passing then we should pass as well." (Amal)

"Yeah and you do it, and we notice you doing it so it makes us want to do it."
(Dalia)

-Interview Responses

To put this comment into context, myself and the other leaders would always engage in the activities we played during each session. We did our best to lead by example and personify the life skills that we were trying to teach. Further, engaging in the activities allowed us to gauge the atmosphere of the group more closely. If we

noticed individuals getting frustrated or disrespectful we could pause the game and discuss any issues. In doing so, we provided an example for youth to follow when they were playing a game. If they got frustrated or noticed something it was normal to stop the game and discuss it.

Beyond the role models youth experienced within the program, an attempt was made to expose the youth to new role models at the university. Youth were given the opportunity to interact, engage, and connect with various university leaders through the Unity Games event. Each youth was paired with a university student and charged with the task of leading a group of younger children through the activities that day. The teens engaged with another older individual that exemplified the life skills were often talked about in our program. This was reflected in observations made that day.

It was great to have the teens asking questions throughout the day. They seemed very interested in the event, the university leaders, and the university program. It was also great to see them interacting and engaging with the university students that they were paired with while leading the groups. I think this connection gave them a chance to interact and be exposed to different leaders and role models than they see on a regular basis (such as myself). Beyond this, the chance for them to mimic the leadership shown by some of these university leaders can help show them that being a leader can be fun and rewarding. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

The interaction between youth and university leaders was an interesting aspect of the program. One of the intentions of bringing the youth to the

university was to expose them to the campus and the Physical Education program. In doing so, youth could familiarize themselves with the campus and it may encourage them to enroll as a student here (maybe even in Physical Education!). Having youth connect with a university student in the PE program may allow the youth to envision themselves in the same position in the future.

Within the weekly program, myself and the other leaders were the minority, in that we were white and domestically born and raised and the majority of youth in the program were African-Canadian and foreign born (there was only one “white” youth that attended the program sporadically). The teens would sometimes joke that I was the only white guy around. In this situation, I was the outsider entering their realm. However, when we brought the youth to the university, they became the minority, as most of the leaders were white. It was interesting to observe the youth in this situation. Initially they were very quiet and reserved (something I had never seen before!). Arriving at the huge university, as a minority and engaging with a large group of older strangers must have been very daunting for them. The subdued response was due to these youth being out of their element. Compounding this issue was that nearly every other leader the youth were exposed to was white. The majority of these leaders were Physical Education majors at the university. Based on my experience, within this faculty there was visually little racial diversity as the majority of students enrolled were white Canadians. When discussing the subject of modeling, the youth lacked leaders that were similar to them racially and ethnically. Although the youth connected with the university leaders, there were none that closely

resembled them visually. The few black or Muslim role models in this setting is something that will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Pride. Throughout the data, the concept of pride arises frequently. Typically, this pride is seen in excerpts from my own observations and reflections. They are often associated with the individual and group successes of the youth in the program.

One example of the youth's leadership was when one of the youngest children at the games had an accident during the event. From the report of one of the other organizers, one of our teens took action, cleaned the little guy up, got him some new clothes and disposed of the mess without so much as blinking an eye. I couldn't believe that one of our teens took such initiative with an event that most others would try to avoid. When I reflected on this, I thought that, for many of our youth, they are called upon to fill these types of roles at home. Something like this may not seem like a big deal to them or like they are taking a leadership role, instead its just a duty that they feel responsible for as an older sibling, etc. Regardless, I couldn't have been more proud of this story and the teen that took action. I am excited to get the chance to talk with her next time I see her.

(Leader's Reflective Journal)

To put this situation in perspective, Rachel was the teen who took this leadership role. Within the program, Rachel is one of the eldest youth, but rarely takes on a leadership role due to her lack of proficiency in English. When put into leadership positions within the program, she sometimes got frustrated when she

could not explain herself accurately to others. However, as the eldest sister in her family, she was often asked to babysit her younger siblings during our program. We wanted to encourage her to come to the program so we allowed her to bring her siblings along. She possessed a natural caring approach when dealing with those younger siblings. When she was put into a leadership position with younger children at the Unity Games she was in her element. She knew how to care for children and demonstrated this incredibly through her actions in the above excerpt. Due to the strong family structures of the youth within the program, many of them had lots of experience working with younger family members. Within the close social network that many of these youth come from, the familial expectation is that youth should help in the caring for young siblings, cousins, nieces, and nephews. As a result, many of the youth performed quite naturally as leaders at the Unity Games. They were quite skilled in taking responsibility for younger children. Our program sought to put youth in situations where they could demonstrate and further practice life skills. This is a shining example of that occurring with a youth that often did not get the opportunity to show her skills.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Relational Time. This subtheme refers to the time that was set-aside for leaders and youth to develop rapport and interact with one another in a less structured setting. Within the program, our relational time often occurred during our walk to and from the gym. This relational time was crucial in allowing leaders to connect with youth and establish a role of caring adult. This was evidenced by the frequency in which the youth sought us out during these times.

Interesting note, I had a great discussion while shooting hoops at the end of the program with one youth and his brother. We discussed their interests in school and what they'd like to do in the future. The oldest brother's interests in political science and hopes of becoming a diplomat were awesome. The younger brother's interests in world religions and thoughts of being a professor or teacher were amazing. I was really happy to hear their interest in school and studying. You can tell their family puts a lot of value in education. I was happy to share some time with them and felt we connected (The older brother even asked me if I thought he could achieve his dreams of being a diplomat- which I felt honored that he was looking to me for support so early). These are incredible kids with such high hopes and dreams, I love being able to help support them as they work toward achieving them. (Leader's Reflective Journal)

This conversation occurred very early in the program with Mahdi and Majid. Both are extremely intelligent young men that had a skill for asking probing questions. They come from an immigrant family of nine that puts an emphasis on education. Mahdi, the eldest brother, embodies this emphasis. He rarely attended program because he needed to do homework or finish a project. It was interesting that he always made time to drop by Everyone's Space to say hello and talk for a few minutes before we left for the gym. Majid, the younger brother, was one of the first youth I ever connected with at the program. He was new to the teen program (having just turned thirteen) when I arrived in the community my first year. He had a joker attitude that I responded to quickly and we formed a bond early. Since then, he has been a consistent attendee of the

program and one of my favorite youth to joke with. Within their family structure, the boys' older siblings had moved out of the house to start jobs or families. They often looked to me for advice as a younger sibling would to any older sibling. This relationship is reflected by the above excerpt and shows how relational time was used to establish these strong relationships.

During the focus group interview, youth expressed their enjoyment of this relational time that was such an integral part of the program. When asked what their favorite aspect of the program was, youth responded as follows.

"Just coming here. Being here is the best part." (Dalia)

"The walk here. We take our time. We joke around and talk." (Badra)

"Yeah when we are at (community centre), we are only there for like 5 minutes and can't really talk much. But on the walk we get to talk." (Amal)

-Interview Responses

As the program leader, I was surprised that the youth enjoyed the walks during the program so much. The respondents in the interview Dalia, Badra, Amal, and Jada all represented varying levels of attendance and experience in the program, yet they all answered similarly. Within the broader community, there are not many young adults who attend post-secondary education. For the younger youth, they simply enjoyed talking to an older youth that took the time to listen and cared about what they had to say. For the older youth that were enrolled in post-secondary education (Amal & Badra) or applying to them (Rachel & Mahdi), this relational time allowed them to talk to us on more of a peer-to-peer level. With these older youth, we could answer questions about student life or similar issues we had

during our own experiences with post-secondary education. Many youth were not comfortable talking to their families about these issues so we provided an outside and caring opinion. This caring approach that leaders took toward each youth was central during this Relational Time.

Pedagogy Subtheme: Teachable Moments. The subtheme of Teachable Moments refers to situations that arose within the program that provided excellent opportunities to bring this life skill education alive for youth. These events occurred sporadically within the program but gave us, as a group, the opportunity to discuss issues or situations and highlight real-life examples of the life skills we have been focusing on within the program.

We also had an interesting chat about controlling our emotions during the games. Sometimes when we play dodgeball, if a teen gets hit and is frustrated, they will toss the ball back at whoever hit them. It's often jokingly done, but occasionally it can be a little too aggressive. I chose to use this as a teachable moment to talk about controlling our emotions.

To put this excerpt into context, originally we avoided playing dodgeball completely. At the outset of the program, youth really struggled to show the level of respect for each other that would enable us to play safely and inclusively. But as the program progressed, youth demonstrated the ability to show each other respect and play the game safely. During a session, Dalia and Caliana, asked to lead a dodgeball game. We agreed that if the group could play safely and respectfully, dodgeball was acceptable. The youth were great and we continued to play modified versions of

dodgeball within the program in the following weeks. In one of the final weeks of the program, one of the community organization's leaders remarked on the maturity of the group compared to the beginning of the program. He was shocked that the same kids that would have ripped each other's heads off at the beginning of the year were now organizing, modifying, and policing their own dodgeball game. The ability of the group to accomplish this was a result of good pedagogy and effective use of teachable moments during the course of the program.

These teachable moments were not only applicable to the youth in the program, they also occurred for myself and the other leaders as we learned how to deliver this type of program.

Beyond this, the other leaders were great at helping the youth to design games. It was interesting that at one point I had to stop one of the leaders from providing input during one of the kid's explanations of a game. He went to provide some input and I stopped him, suggesting that we need to let them struggle and figure it out themselves. I think as teachers we are so used to helping youth that we want to jump in and rescue them whenever they start to struggle. But if we rescue them every time they struggle, how will they ever know how to survive themselves. I think this was a perfect example of letting them struggle and sort out any issues for themselves. As I have mentioned, the program atmosphere needs to be one where youth feel safe to struggle and work through these types of issues for themselves without feeling negative about themselves.

Again in context, one of the leaders, Frank, is a great teacher candidate in the Faculty of Physical Education at the university. He is a fabulous teacher and wants to

help the youth learn as best he can. His intentions were good however he did not realize that by allowing the youth to struggle, they would learn more from the activity. This was a great teachable moment for he and I.

Major Theme: Life Skills

A major theme that arose within the data revolved around life skills. There were a wide variety of life skills that were addressed over the course of the program. Excerpts from the data refer to the activities that were intended to help foster life skills, incidences when youth demonstrated life skills, and incidences when they were lacking. These excerpts will be analyzed further within Chapter 5. In general, the youth commented on their life skill education experience during the interview and how it was different from the same education they receive in their regular schooling.

"We learn it in school but here we are improving it."

"Yeah we show it more here than we do at school."

"Cause we like it here so we want to show it."

-Interview Responses

Life Skill Subtheme: Responsibility. Excerpts refer to incidences where responsibility was the focus. In their responses, youth demonstrated their understanding of what it meant to be responsible.

"Well we had, like us and then somebody else with us, so there were two leaders per groups. But just imagine if it was one person, it would just be chaos. You

wouldn't be able to handle it yourself. Like the four year olds, it was like chaos! You had one kid running one way and another going that way! And you only have two hands so how are you supposed to keep all these kids together when all they want to do is just run around." (Amal)

-Interview Responses

For many of the youth, they had experienced caring for one or two younger children before but never a larger group. They were used to being responsible for the well being of others and the Unity Games gave them the opportunity to expand this skill to caring for a larger group. Youth showcased their understanding of responsibility and had this idea further challenged through this experience. As this excerpt suggests, youth realized that being responsible for many children could be challenging yet it was achievable. The Unity Games experience helped them to further refine these responsibility skills.

Life Skill Subtheme: Respect. The youth in the group demonstrated their understanding of respect within the interview and individual responses.

"Be respectful when someone else is talking. Not interrupting them." (Dalia)

-Interview Responses

"I was respectful by listening & following all the rules. Participating and working as a team with my partner. :) :) :D"

"I listened to my teammates ideas and respected them."

"I felt I was respectful as when a player on my team missed a shot, I did not put them down, but encouraged them to keep shooting. If you keep encouraging your teammates they won't give up and they will feel better about themselves and your team will work better together."

"I did not show respect today because at the end I started talking and being disrespectful. A way I can improve is to not get carried away and start talking. By Buttcrack"

-Personal Written Responses

Early in the program, the subject of respect was addressed in order to establish a positive environment for youth to learn in. Respect was established as the core value that needed to always be present between all members of the group at all times. For the youth, respect was often associated with listening to others. This was often where, as the leader, I would remind them that they needed to be respectful when we were explaining games or instructing. This emphasis on respectful listening skills was reiterated by youth in many of their responses. Youth also suggested that respect was shown through mutual support for one another in the group. By supporting your teammates, the team will accomplish its goals and everyone will feel positively.

The concept of respect was a crucial one with regard to the development of a positive culture within the program. The following excerpts indicate incidences when youth struggled to exhibit respect.

We moved to basketball and the group transformed. All of a sudden there was no cooperation, no respect, hitting and arguing everywhere. I sat on the sidelines and watched in frustration. I didn't want to interfere because I wanted to see how the other leaders responded. The kids continued to be disrespectful until finally I called the game. I was pretty disappointed and expressed this with the group.

At points in the program, youth would struggle with the concept of respect. To put this into context, this event occurred near the end of the program's duration. The other leaders running the program took over for me one night that I was feeling ill. Both have a very passive approach to teaching (different than my approach) and for some reason, the youth took advantage of this and were very disruptive, disrespectful toward each other, and disorganized. When situations like this occurred, we pause the game, engage in a discussion concerning respect and decide how we were going to move forward. These negative situations resulted in positive discussions and a mutual understanding between all members of the group concerning the expectations of the program.

Life Skill Subtheme: Communication. The youth often associated being respectful with listening to leaders or peers during the program. These listening skills (and broader communication skills) were a big focus of the program. Effort was made to design activities specifically to challenge the communication skills of the group and highlight the need for good communication.

Following this, we played some team cooperation games that required youth to lead a “blind” member around the gym to collect items and return them to their scoring area. This activity worked really well as all the youth were communicating to help their teammate.

When life skill lessons were embedded within the games we played, it became very easy for youth to witness the importance of them. When good communication skills were necessary for the success of the game, youth quickly gained an understanding of the importance of these skills. Following the game, we discussed these concepts as a group and reinforced this importance. Further, we related the importance of these life skills not only within the game, but also in our lives outside of the program. It was the proper embedding of life skills such as communication that made these lessons come alive for youth and make sense.

Life Skills Subtheme: Effort. Effort within the program referred to two things; a willingness to try new activities and a willingness to persist in activities when they become difficult. Youth demonstrated how they understood the concept of effort through their personal responses.

“110% which means its great. I pushed myself by running faster, passing faster, pushing myself to be a better team member.”

“I was really committing 2 da games. I wanted 2 be a part of da games so I pushed myself 2 run a lot.”

-Personal Written Responses

For youth, effort referred to the ability to push oneself and try hard during the activities. Often youth would associate a percentage with regard to the level of effort they showed that session. Youth were generally very honest with themselves, applying accurate evaluations of their level of effort. This was a concept that youth grasped quite well.

Certain lessons within the program were also designed specifically to challenge youth to showcase and assess their own level of effort within the activities.

We also talked about the idea of effort within fitness. The more effort you put into your workout, the more benefit you will get from it. This was a really well received message judging from the response of the kids...I suggested that during the 2 hours we have each Wednesday night, it is a great opportunity for them to work toward becoming fit.

By embedding the concept of effort into fitness activities, youth were able to understand the concept and challenge their effort level in a meaningful way. The response from the youth was an increased level of effort in the activities.

Life Skill Subtheme: Teamwork/Cooperation. Again, youth expressed their understanding of teamwork and cooperation through their personal responses. Specifically with regard to cooperation, youth expressed their understanding of what it meant to cooperate,

"I cooperated because I help people during the basketball game. I cooperated by letting team members go first, example bump I let someone in front of me. Also passing to others while playing basketball."

-Personal Written Response

Cooperation and teamwork were similar concepts within the program. For youth, these concepts meant working well with others to accomplish a goal or putting the needs of others before your own.

With regard to teamwork, youth also expressed their understanding of this concept when working together to come up with a game for the rest of their peers to participate in.

"Working together with my partner it was good. We liked explaining the game to the group and the game went well. We should do it more often!!"

-Personal Written Response

Youth worked really well together as they designed a game and instructed the rest of the group. They showed their ability to work together in order to accomplish a goal.

Life Skill Subtheme: Self-Awareness. An interesting subtheme of self-awareness emerged closer to the conclusion of the program. It was interesting to see youth in the program engage in self-assessment of their performances or behaviour during the program.

We talked about the need to control our emotions when we get frustrated within the game. We even talked about how losing control in a game might not be so bad, however losing control out in our daily lives can lead to some very bad consequences. It was interesting to get the teens views on this and have them relate it to their lives outside of the program. This I hope can help them to transfer some of the discussions or skills practiced in the program to their outside lives.

Youth often lost control of their emotions when they became frustrated within the game. During these occurrences, we would either pause the game or one of the leaders would engage the youth in a private discussion concerning the behaviour. The importance of emotional control was stressed. Youth became much more aware of how they were feeling and reacting to certain situations. As a result, youth began to show restraint when frustrated within activities.

Life Skill Subtheme: Leadership. The subtheme of Leadership emerged quite frequently within the program. The ultimate goal was to give youth a leadership experience at the Unity Games. Much of the program was directed toward developing and practicing leadership skills. This was evidenced in the youth responses during the interview.

“Yeah cause remember we had the one time when you got us to explain our games and run them for the group. That taught us a leading role and how to like become a leader so that we could lead the games for others.” (Dalia)

-Interview Response

Youth were challenged to first take on a leadership role within the confines of the program. This took the form of instructing their fellow peers during activities or games. Once they grew comfortable leading their peers within the safety of the program, we challenged them to help take a leading role at the Unity Games. This excerpt provides evidence that the process helped youth practice and refine their leadership skills.

Youth displayed an understanding of leadership that was evidenced in their written responses.

"You can be a leader by taking care of your followers. For example a mother and child, or owner and pet."

"I can be a leader by listening to my groups ideas. By directing people to do the right thing."

"Being a leader: listen when other people are talking and give them respect."

-Personal Written Responses

Youth demonstrated a unique understanding of some of these life skill concepts. The first excerpt suggests that leadership involves ensuring the well being of those who depend on you. The second suggests that leadership involves listening skills (often talked about in the program) and guiding others to do the right thing. The third, reiterates the importance of listening and also showing respect to those who follow you (another concept frequently discussed in the

program). Clearly youth possessed an understanding of what it meant to be a leader.

Youth expressed their understanding of leadership through their experience as a leader at the Unity Games.

"It was kinda boring. I didn't get to really play games. I had to look over the kids the whole time. By anonymous"

"Taking a leadership role was better than I thought. But it was hard when they don't listen to you when you want them to do something."

"I thought it was a good experience and I learned a lot about being a leader. I had to make sure that every child was participating in the games. Faleese Navy Dad!"

-Personal Written Responses

Taking a leadership role at the Unity Games was a new experience for many youth. For some, like the youth in the first excerpt, the responsibility of caring for the children took away from their own participation in the activities. For others, like excerpts two and three, taking on a leadership role brought with it responsibilities and challenges that they did not anticipate. Overall, the experience opened their eyes to their ability to serve as a successful leader within this type of setting. It taught them new skills and allowed them to further refine others.

From the outset of the program, leadership was a major focus. This is evidenced by excerpts throughout the course of the program highlighting the efforts made by all program members.

The games the youth came up with were great! We had an original scooter board handball game, flip the tarp (from the resource), and capture the flag. It was interesting to see some of the youth take on leadership roles with regard to instructing and running the games. Some were quite uncomfortable being in the spotlight and tried to defer responsibility to their partner. Others struggled with the language barrier when explaining. Yet others (mainly older youth) controlled the group and explained the games well (I think they are used to this role in their homes and community).

Again within the program the effort was made to provide youth with the opportunity to practice their leadership skills within a safe environment. It was interesting to note that youth who had experience with younger family members were typically more skilled within these scenarios. They had previous experience explaining tasks and instructing others therefore this task was not completely new to them.

Major Theme: Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned Subtheme: Pedagogical Practices A final theme that emerged referred to my struggle as the program leader to deal with certain aspects of running this type of program. As this theme emerged, I thought that it could be of some use to others running similar programs in the future. The following excerpts present some of the issues that the program, the youth, and myself faced throughout the year and how I tried to address each one. These included the struggles faced by

leaders with regard to our own pedagogy and the attempt to create a great learning environment for youth. Specifically, I struggled with ensuring that I was focused on the ultimate goal of the program during its delivery.

As a leader, I have so many games I want to get through in a short period of time.

But I need to remember, at the end of the day, what is more important, that we played 4 games efficiently and correctly or that we played 2 games a little less efficiently but the kids had fun, were included and took something away from it.

As the adage goes “kids are sacred, games are not” (thanks Jamie). I need to do a better job of being mindful of my instructional approach. By cutting down the number of games and focusing on empowering youth and trying to educate life skills, the youth will ultimately take more from the program.

Early in the program, I found myself battling the urge to push through and cover all of the activities that I had carefully planned out in my lesson plan. I felt the need to stick to a schedule and cover everything that was on that piece of paper. As time passed, I realized that flexibility was key to this program and I needed to adjust the program based on the needs of the youth participating. If they needed more time to figure out a communication activity, I would make more time. If they enjoyed leading activities and wanted to make up more games, I would scrap my plan and continue to encourage them to take on this type of leadership opportunity. In doing so, I was able to create a program that revolved around the needs of the youth and moved at a pace that their needs and desires determined. As instructors, we always have a curriculum that we are expected to

deliver, but the curriculum should not dictate the pace of the lesson, the needs of the youth should. This is something all educational settings should strive for.

I also struggled with the balance between engaging youth in discussion or challenging them in order to develop life skills and providing them with entertainment to keep them returning each week.

This brings me to a dilemma that I face as a program leader for a drop in style program. I want to try to attract youth to the program by keeping them happy and engaged in activities that they enjoy. However, I also have to deal with issues of respect and offer programming that is inclusive toward the interests of all. It is a constant struggle to create programming that keeps everyone happy. I could cater to the interests of these two youth and play basketball to keep them happy and prevent them from being disrespectful, but why would I neglect all the other kids in the program? Beyond this, when having to deal with discipline issues, I need to tread carefully. Embarrassing or blowing up on a kid when I am frustrated will surely lead to them dropping out of the program. I need to take care in approaching these issues diplomatically and calmly to ensure that the issue is dealt with. This is always the balancing act, being firm enough to deal with behaviour issues and not get walked all over, but fair enough that the youth still want to come to the program and enjoy it. I think program leaders universally face this dilemma.

The challenge for me as a program leader was to find a way to creatively embed the life skill education within activities that were fun and enjoyable for the youth. If I droned on each day and bored the youth with endless discussion, they

simply would stop showing up. On the other hand, if I only focused on having fun and assumed the life skill education would spontaneously occur, the results of this life skill experience would be drastically different. Therefore I challenged myself to create a program that was enjoyable for youth to participate in, yet taught them something more than just keeping active. The key was careful lesson planning with regard to the embedding of life skills while also taking advantage of teachable moments in order to address issues as they occur, teaching life skills and lessons on the fly.

Another issue was that I also experienced a number of incidences where I doubted the success of the program and my own efforts as program leader.

Following the program, it was interesting to get the other leaders opinions. They felt frustrated and that the kids kind of walked over them as they were new. The leaders both have a more passive style of leadership and they commented that when I run the program, my personality is more commanding naturally and the kids have learned that they can't get away with acting certain ways while I am running the show. This works when I am around, but what about when I'm not? Have these teens really learned anything about respect, responsibility for their actions, and leadership, if they don't show these attributes for someone else within the same setting? Have they really learned anything in the program if they can't make this transfer? As a leader of this program, I am really discouraged by this. Sure they can be great when I'm around, but I won't be for long and I hope that some of the things we discuss leave more of a lasting impression on these youth. Otherwise, is this even worth doing?

I did my best to allow the leaders to struggle and regain control but eventually I intervened and engaged the youth in a discussion about respect toward others. I was disappointed in the youth but also in myself as a leader. I felt as though the youth had matured and refined a lot of life skills during the course of the program. This session made me doubt that any of the progress that had been made was fleeting. I doubted whether anything we had done would make a lasting impact on these teens or whether we were wasting our time. This self-doubt is necessary in the delivery of such a program. It forced us to reexamine our approach to the program and assess whether or not it was working. As it turns out, this was just one of those nights that the youth were a bit unruly and not a reflection of their overall behaviour. This critical self-reflection and readjustment is a key component for leading a successful youth program.

Lessons Learned Subtheme: Youth's experience in school PE. Beyond the pedagogical lessons, as a program leader, I also learned a tremendous amount about delivering a program for youth who's ethnicity differed from my own. I got the impression, through informal discussions with youth, that the physical activity experience within the program was very different than the type of experience they had within their school PE. As a point of interest to me, I followed this up with youth during the focus group interview. Their responses helped shed some light on what youth enjoyed within our program and what they disliked in their school PE.

"Well here you have like a choice. But there you're playing basketball and that's it. (Badra)"

"Yeah and there we don't hardly ever get to play games. They force you to go work out or sometimes they make you play sports that you don't want to play."

(Dalia)

"You get marked on it." (Jada)

"Yeah you get marked on whether you are doing it or not." (Amal)

"Yeah here we don't get marked on it, we just have fun." (Dalia)

"Yeah like here, here we have a choice to do things. Like you can or cannot do things but at school you have to." (Badra)

Interview Responses

These comments suggested that the experience of youth within our program was more positive than that of their regular PE. The youth spoke of having choice, suggesting that this was key to their enjoyment. This choice was a simple form of empowerment that was used during the program to increase youth's motivation to participate. Empowerment was clearly important to youth and they felt as though they did not get these same opportunities within the PE classroom setting. This type of feedback helped us to ensure that we continued to include empowerment within our program lessons.

Lessons Learned Subtheme: Lack of Minority Role Models. As program leaders, we sought to serve as positive role models for youth participating in the program. The thought was that through exposure, youth could gain insight into some of the qualities that different leaders possessed and could model themselves after. This was reiterated frequently within the data.

I felt it was important to have the youth come to the university for this night and interact with the other game leaders (who are all undergraduate/graduate PE students). In doing so, they are on an equal level as the university students and will be treated as such. They will also be expected to carry themselves with the same respect and exhibit proper behaviour. I am hoping that the inclusion of the youth will have a positive influence on them.

The interaction with older role models exposed youth to different leadership styles. However, one issue that arose during the Unity Games was none of the university leaders were from the same ethnic or cultural background as youth. In fact, very few would have been considered minorities. As the leader, I wanted to provide the youth with role models that they could envision themselves modeling in the future. Often we identify with a role model if they are similar to us. The youth still were able to connect and identify with the role models that were at the Unity Games, however they could have taken more from the event if they also identified with the role models on a cultural or ethnic level. This was something I wish I could have provided more for the youth in the program.

Lessons Learned Subtheme: Financial Barriers to PA for Minority Youth.

During the course of the program, I gained incredibly valuable insight into the lives of the youth participating in the program. Specifically, I came to understand some of the barriers they faced with regards to accessing opportunities to be physically active.

The chats I have had with the youth of the program have opened my eyes to some of the unique struggles that they face growing up in Canadian society today.

Although I can never fully understand their struggles, this experience has given me a newfound appreciation for the resilience of these kids, their families and immigrants to Canada in general. I am so glad that these youth feel as though they can open up with us about these types of intimate struggles and issues.

During our walks to and from the gym, I was given glimpses into the lives of these youth outside of the program. Youth spoke of the struggles their families had as new Canadians. It was during these moments that I gained insight into the difficulties that these youth face as marginalized members of society. For many families, it was difficult for parents to secure quality employment opportunities. In many households, fathers were working in positions below or completely outside their educational or occupational training. Mothers often could not secure permanent work or worked small side jobs for “under the table” money. These situations were typically due to a lack of proficiency in English, the need to care for a family, or lack of opportunity to find work. Due to this reality, often families struggled financially. It was very common that youth relied on part-time jobs to support themselves and supplement some of their parents’ income. This made participation in recreational sport and activity a luxury that some youth could not afford. In fact Saadia, one of the most engaged youth in the first year of the program, had to stop coming because she needed to work during the nights that the program ran. It was apparent the financial standing of families could serve as a barrier to physical activity for many youth in the program.

Lessons Learned Subtheme: Cultural Barriers to PA for Muslim Females.

For many females, participation in physical activity was made more difficult by some of the cultural expectations that were put on them. Family views on physical activity were positive; women were not discouraged from participating in our program or any of its activities. In fact, we had a mother once join one of our games in her hijab and a traditional dress! I thought that this was an excellent example for many of the females in our group, showing that activity is something that can be enjoyed by all, regardless of age or dress.

As long as an activity did not conflict with the cultural or religious practices of the youth, they were free to engage in it. A few of the females in the program wore a hijab as part of their families' Muslim beliefs. During the program this never impacted their participation in activities. However, one night we took the group swimming at the university pool. These girls wore a standard one-piece swimsuit and to my surprise, entered the pool area without their hijabs. I asked them about it and they said because people from their community rarely swim at this pool and the viewing area is so small, they can normally get away with not wearing it. I asked them if they ever swim at their local YMCA. There is a large viewing area at this facility and many members of their community frequent the location due to its close proximity to the neighborhood. They said they could not swim there freely without damaging the reputations of themselves and their families. This is a unique cultural barrier that many female Muslims face here in Canada. As a program facilitator, I was completely oblivious to this issue and was just lucky that the facilities at the university allowed the youth to participate. A situation could have easily arisen

where these youth would have been prevented from participating due to my lack of knowledge in their religious beliefs. This topic will be revisited in Chapter 5.

Lessons Learned Subtheme: Program Youths' Preference for Basketball.

An observation that was made during the program was the youths' preference for playing basketball when given the choice of what activity they wished to play. This arises several times within the data.

I asked them what it was about last week that they enjoyed. Many said the basketball so I suggested that if basketball is something they want to do each day, we can do it, the group just needs to communicate that to me and we can facilitate.

Again when asked what they wanted to do, the group said basketball...Once again I was impressed by the youth's ability to pass and work as a team. This again highlighted the cooperation and teamwork aspects of the lesson.

The preference for the game of basketball was obvious amongst program youth.

It seemed to be widely accepted for both males and females. This got me wondering what it was about the sport that made it so appealing to these youth?

This inspired me to investigate the subject further within Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

I was recently asked to describe the findings of my research study in twenty-five words or less. I responded with, “A positive environment developed within the physical activity program that helped youth to practice and further develop their life skills.” In reality, there was a lot more that came out of the study that I will begin to delve into in this chapter. I will begin by explaining what I found and answer the research questions posed. I will then relate these findings to this area of research and practice, and finally my suggestions with regard to future research. With regard to the findings of this study, I will be using the findings to answer my research questions.

1. How did youth within the program experience life skill education?



Figure 5.0 How did youth within the program experience life skill education?

As a program leader and researcher, it was fascinating to look at the data and see that youth were making connections between the life skills taught and what they took from the program. As a program facilitator, I am not naïve in saying that these youth enter the program with zero knowledge of life skills and leave fully versed in the concepts. Comments in the interviews suggested that the teens were taught these types of lessons or skills in school but preferred to show them within the confines of the program. This could be reflective of the positive environment that developed within the program, as youth felt motivated to showcase their abilities in our setting. Linked to this, interview comments suggested that youth knew of these life skills already but the program offered them a place to “improve” or practice them.

Youth also commented that their experience with this life skill education was not always explicit. They refer to moments of reflection following the activities that we participated in. During these reflections or discussions, what they were learning in a specific game dawned on them as they saw it represented or “come to life” within the activity. As a facilitator, these moments of connection are what were strived for each night. The idea that a participant can participate and recognize the life skills being addressed within an activity is great. Connected to this was the comment that, following these reflective moments, youth recognized that the next time they did an activity, they might think differently. These reflective thought processes show an understanding of the life skills being taught and how they impact youth within their own lives.

Responsibility. This was the very first life skill addressed within the program. It is interesting to see how the concept of responsibility took hold within the group. Initially as a group, we tried to come up with a consensus of what it means to be responsible. By getting the group to define responsibility together, it gave members ownership of the idea. When referring back to the idea of being responsible in the program, all members of the group understood what that entailed. Reviewing the observations, responsibilities begin as very basic within the program (i.e. helping clean up, setting up music) but as time passed, responsibilities became more involved. Youth were encouraged to take responsibility over their own fitness, instructing activities, and culminating with helping lead a group of children at the Unity Games event. Reviewing the interview data suggests that the level of responsibility that was required as a leader at the Unity Games was something new for many of the youth. As stated before, for many youth, the expectation was that they helped to care for younger family members. A few youth were quite skilled at caring for young children however they lacked the experience with a large group. This program, specifically their role at the Unity Games, gave them the opportunity to expand their abilities. The comments suggest that this was a positive but eye-opening experience for them. This exposure to taking on new responsibilities was key to their personal growth and development.

Respect. The life skill of respect was something that needed to be established and understood early to help enable a positive learning environment for the group. Again, as a group, we defined what respect meant to us, what was

considered respectful behaviour, but also what was considered disrespectful behaviour. This group consensus was captured visually on a large sheet. In doing so, we could refer back to what we all agreed as being respectful/disrespectful should any scenarios arise. The concept of respect was crucial to the program running in a positive way. There were a number of examples of issues regarding disrespect and my response. These were always addressed through an open discussion with individuals or the group and often resulted in establishing a mutual understanding of what was expected of all members within the group (including myself). It is interesting to note that within the data, I did not explicitly refer to any instances where youth exhibited respectful behaviour (something I wish I had tried to positively reinforce within the group more often).

It is interesting to see how each youth understood the concept of respect. A majority of their comments often referred to showing respect by listening to others (leaders, teammates, etc). Being respectful also took on the form of following rules, participating, working together, and encouraging each other. Youth were critical of their own level of respect within their individual responses, suggesting that they could have listened better or refrained from interrupting others. These comments represent a solid understanding of the concept of respect. The group defined respect together, it was solidified throughout the course of the program, and finally it manifested itself within the data collected. I am confident that the concept of respect was something that all members of the group understood deeply.

Within the broader community, youth had learned to be respectful toward parents or those in positions of authority. This transferred into the program well as

they often showed leaders a higher level of respect. However, they struggled to extend this same respect to one another. This was a skill that we tried to practice within the confines of the program. The group was encouraged to show other members respect when playing or instructing. This was grasped by the youth within the program quite well. Toward the end of the program, the group could respectfully engage in peer-to-peer instruction, discussion, and policing of the games. It was evident that youth had gained a considerable understanding of the concept of respect as it related to their interactions with others.

Communication. This was perhaps one of the most interesting life skills that were addressed during the program. At the outset of the program I found myself frustrated with what seemed like a lack of listening skills amongst the youth. I attribute this to a combination of three things; first, I had yet to gain the respect of the group. Second, the youth are young and excited during these sessions and are focused on being social. Finally, there is a cultural difference with regard to conversations that I began to understand. As I got to know the youth and witnessed how they communicate within their family structure, I realized that communication occurs differently. The youth are used to a very chatty atmosphere where communication occurs rapidly and seemingly all at once. From my cultural perspective, I am used to a slower pace of conversation therefore I did not understand their perspective until I witnessed it happening. What I mistakenly thought was a lack of listening was sometimes due in part to the natural way in which many of these youth communicate at home.

Initially, youth were accustomed to talking all at once. This was not very successful within the program as youth often missed instructions and needed further clarification. As the program leader doing most of the instructing, this was very frustrating. We needed to come to some sort of middle ground in order for me to feel happy as the program leader and the youth to be happy as participants. Through the activities, the importance of clear communication and proper listening skills were emphasized. Many of the activities or games hinged on good two-way communication in order to be successful, leading to teachable moments where youth could see this importance come to life. Beyond this, I tried to explain my perspective toward youth with regard to communication. I explained that, from my perspective, when others are talking while I am trying to speak it seems disrespectful and frustrates me. On the other hand, I approached instructing with a better understanding of the background these youth come from. The result was a mutual understanding of the expectations and perspectives of each other. For the youth, they understood my perspective and expectations toward communication. This is evidenced within their personal responses through the emphasis on showing respect by listening to others. For myself, I came to understand the perspectives and expectations of the youth and adjusted my own accordingly. Personally, this experience was great for my own growth individually and as an educator.

Effort. To review, effort within the program referred to; a willingness to try new activities and a willingness to persist in activities when they become difficult. Often fitness activities were used to stress the importance of investment and return.

The more the youth invest into being active the more health benefits they will receive in return. The idea of trying your best and challenging yourself was emphasized during the program. Within the responses, youth demonstrated an understanding of effort when they comment on pushing themselves, committing to the games, and working hard. Youth also commented when they felt they lacked effort during some of the program sessions. This awareness was interesting as it showed the ability and willingness to self-reflect (the whole purpose of the self-reflective questions at the end of each session). Comments such as this were reassuring (helps to know I was not just asking questions for no reason!).

Teamwork/Cooperation. The life skill concepts of teamwork and cooperation were a little easier to address as many of the more complex team-based games we played (basketball, handball, etc) emphasize the need for these. As a result, it was easier for me to create situations within activities that stressed the importance of working together toward a common goal. This led to many quality teachable moments where I could pause a game, engage the youth in discussion and have them analyze and gain a further understanding of their own performance as a team. Youth demonstrated their understanding of this within their personal responses, citing things like passing, putting others needs before their own, trusting teammates, and sharing. These comments were often linked to positive comments that suggested the youth truly enjoyed working together. The youth emphasized fun, productivity, being successful, and a desire to do similar activities in the future.

Self-Awareness. The concept of self-awareness was not explicitly emphasized but arose within the program. As mentioned before, the ability to self-reflect shown in the youth's personal responses demonstrated a level of self-awareness. Beyond this, self-awareness was addressed during a few teachable moments. When I expressed disappointment during some of our discussions, youth had the ability to discuss their responses and behaviour in an intelligent way. This often led to a mutual agreement with regard to the course of action that we should take in the future. Youth demonstrated the ability to analyze, understand, and control their own reactions during various situations.

This self-awareness was usually more evident amongst the elder members of the group. These youth seemed to possess a level of understanding that allowed them to analyze their own thoughts and feelings in order to understand and control them. Some of the younger members of the group lacked this understanding. Others such as Dalia, seemed to mature and develop some of this understanding over the duration of the program.

Leadership. Leadership was a higher-level life skill concept that was the ultimate goal of the program. Much of the program focused on allowing youth the opportunity to practice and further develop their leadership skills within a safe environment. This was done gradually by having them instruct, create activities, and lead the group. Some struggled with this new role at first, but generally their personal responses refer to an enjoyment of these activities and a yearning to continue to do them. Interview responses suggest that being exposed to situations

that challenged their leadership skills helped the youth to further develop. From my own perspective, the youth did very well and really enjoyed the challenge of being a leader within the program.

As a group, we tried to establish what it meant to be a leader. Youth responses referred to being a role model for others, listening to the group, caring for others, and being respectful. These responses suggest an understanding of the qualities and skills necessary to be a successful leader.

Finally, youth were given the opportunity to put these skills to the test on a grander scale at the Unity Games. From my own observations, youth served as fantastic leaders during the day. They served as great role models, were engaged, responsible, and went above and beyond what was asked of them when dealing with the kids at the event. This experience challenged their leadership skills in a new way and the youth of the program delivered amazingly. As the old saying goes, actions speak louder than words. The same could be said for the youths' understanding of leadership. Through their actions at Unity Games, youth showcased an understanding of what it means to be a leader and demonstrated it throughout the day. Their responses reflect an overall enjoyment of the leadership experience. For many youth, this was the first time they experienced such a role. These youth were typically the younger members of the group who had less experience caring for others (i.e. younger family members). Others had an abundance of experience caring for others and being responsible for their well-being. This previous experience made the transition to being a leader at the Unity Games a little more smooth. However, many youth expressed their surprise at the difficulty of caring for a

number of young children all at once. Some expressed surprise at how much fun it could be. Other expressed a new appreciation for how much work it takes to be a leader in such a setting. For all youth, this Unity Games experience allowed them to continue to refine whatever level of leadership skills they possessed.

Generally, within the program, youth experienced life skills in a wide variety of ways. Whether implicitly or explicitly, the program put youth in situations where they were challenged to practice, analyze, and reflect upon their own behaviour and thought processes. In doing so, they practiced a deeper understanding of these life skills and how they influence their own lives. This has been clearly demonstrated and documented through my observations as well as their own responses within this study. As a result, the data collected has adequately answered how youth within the program experience life skill education.

2. How did my role as program leader influence youths' life skill education experience?

To begin to answer this research question, I will refer back to the idea that life skills are taught, not caught (Hodge, 1989) meaning that careful planning needs to take place on the part of the educator in order for this type of learning to occur. My own pedagogical approach was extremely important in understanding how my role as the program leader influenced the life skill education experience for these youth. As a program leader, I used specific pedagogical tools in an effort to bring this life skill education to light. In this section, I will explain how the pedagogical tools of

discussion, embedding, empowerment, modeling, and teachable moments each played a part in influencing the life skill education experience for these youth.

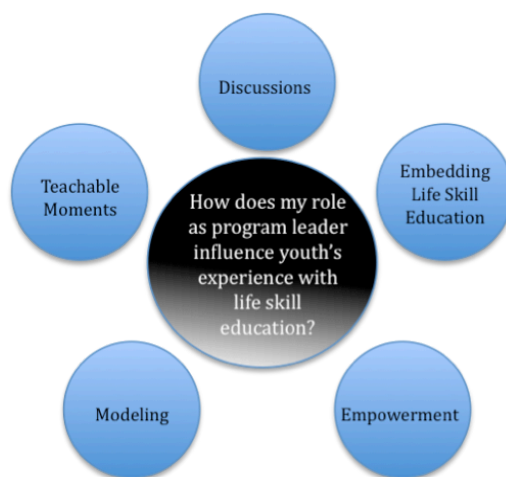


Figure 5.1 How did my role as program leader influence youths' life skill education experience?

Discussions. Discussions within the program were used frequently to allow participants to voice their opinions and concerns. They served as an opportunity to address issues democratically. Initially, I observed that youth struggled with these discussions, as they did not feel comfortable engaging. I attribute this initial hesitation to the youth's lack of comfort with me as I had yet to establish rapport with them. Also, I got the sense that many of the youth were not used to engaging an educator in this type of democratic discussion. Within their typical classroom and family structures, communication is usually top-down and delivered by an authoritative figure. Rarely had these youth been asked to take an active role within their education through meaningful discussion. It took some time for youth to become comfortable offering their perspectives and opinions but as time passed, youth actively engaged and enjoyed steering their learning process. My own

observations are filled with examples of youth engaging in this democratic decision-making process.

At the beginning of each session, the discussion would usually help us to frame what we had learned previously and what would be our focus for the night. Initially I found myself dominating the conversation but as time passed, the youth began to take control of these discussions and steer them toward concepts that were meaningful to their lives. This same process was repeated at the conclusion of the program, allowing youth to reflect upon what was learned within the night's session and relate it to their lives outside the program. Youth commented that it was often during these discussions that the life skills being discussed would make sense. They could reflect upon the activity that they just engaged in and see that particular life skills' importance within it. Through the facilitation of these discussions, I was able to positively influence the experience of life skill education for these youth.

Embedding Life Skill Education. One of the most challenging aspects of delivering this program was coming up with creative ways to embed this type of education within the activities. Care was taken to select activities that were enjoyable and engaging for youth but also could be used to highlight specific life skills for them. Several of my own reflections suggest success in selecting activities that met both criteria. Beyond this, when care was not taken in selecting activities, youth engagement decreased and the objectives of the program failed to be met. This highlighted the need for careful planning when attempting to educate youth in life skills. The youth commented that learning life skills seemed to “just come

naturally” during the sessions. This type of education may appear to occur spontaneously from the perspective of the youth participating, however the only way this occurs is due to purposeful, detailed and careful planning on the part of the educator. Good organization on my part as the program leader made the learning process occur more smoothly.

Empowerment. The pedagogical concept of empowerment arose frequently within the data and attributed greatly to the success of the program in providing a life skill education experience. The simplest and most common version of empowerment occurred when youth were given the opportunity to select the activities that they wished to participate in that session. This provided youth the opportunity to express their opinions and come to a decision democratically. Further empowerment occurred when I would periodically pause a game to allow youth the opportunity to provide feedback or express themselves. This again reinforced the idea that each member’s voice was valued and necessary within any of our group decisions.

One of the most powerful interview comments highlights the successful empowerment of youth within the program, “Here you have more freedom. Like here you’re more comfortable, with the people that are around and cause you get to choose.” It is clear that the freedom to make choices within the program contributed positively to the youth’s experience within the program. A positive relationship between all members of the group developed by providing opportunities for youth to feel empowered. When youth felt as though their voice mattered and was

respected, they were more likely to engage in the learning process in a positive way. This thought is echoed in many of my reflections as a positive experience typically resulted when control over the learning process was shifted toward the youth participating. When youth felt respected, they tended to show more respect toward others. This mutual respect for the opinions of all members of the group led to the establishment of a strong rapport with even the most guarded of youth in the program. As the data would suggest, empowerment was one of the most powerful tools in helping to establish a positive environment within the program. My role as the program leader depended heavily on my ability to facilitate these empowering opportunities within the program.

Modeling. A concerted effort was made to provide youth with exposure to positive role models who embodied the type of life skills that we were focusing on. Youth interview comments suggest that the way program leaders played the activities or games served as a positive reminder for them to imitate. When we emphasized teamwork, we demonstrated this through successful passing and thus provided a concrete example for them to follow.

Throughout the program, youth were exposed to a variety of role models including myself, the other program leaders, and university students at the Unity Games. Exposure to these role models provided youth with a wide variety of examples of how they could exemplify some of these positive life skills. Through the Unity Games experience, youth were given the opportunity to see different forms of leadership. The thought is that this can provide them with concrete examples of

leadership that they may choose to emulate in the future. Again, my ability to serve as a positive role model and facilitate youth's exposure to other role models influenced the life skill education of the youth within the program.

Teachable Moments. Teachable moments were considered the “golden opportunities” for myself and the other leaders to address life skill education within the program. The activities were always designed in an attempt to bring the life skills to light, however when an example arose within the game, it was the responsibility of the program leaders to pounce on it. The data is littered with examples of these moments when addressing respect, responsibility, emotional control, and so on.

Teachable moments provided the opportunity to highlight and engage in discussion surrounding a particular life skill. In doing so, a concrete connection could be established between our discussion topics and the real-life example within the game. Beyond this, it provided youth the opportunity to critically reflect upon the experience and understand how these life skills relate.

These teachable moments were not restricted to the experience of youth. As leaders, we also experienced these moments while delivering the program. The reflective process involved in discussing these teachable moments is crucial in allowing us to reassess our approach to certain situations. By analyzing our behaviour and responses, youth and leaders both engaged in an active learning process from which they benefited greatly. As the program leader, I was able to

engage youth in this life skill education experience through combination of concrete teachable moments and the subsequent reflective process that followed.

All of these pedagogical tools were crucial in helping me to facilitate a life skill education experience that youth could benefit from. Through the data it was clear that my role as the program leader positively impacted these youth's experience with life skill education.

3. What aspects of the program facilitate the life skill education experience?

As a study using ethnographic methods, the influence of the program was crucial to youths' life skills education experience. Although the program and its success were influenced by many of the concepts that were previously discussed, the following concepts are strongly linked with the establishment of a positive program environment. The following concepts are the key aspects of the program that created a positive environment and facilitated this life skill education experience. The subthemes used to answer this question came from the major themes of Culture, Leader Pedagogy, and Lessons Learned. Within the Lessons, Learned theme specifically, the subthemes surrounding the topic of ethnicity sparked an area of discussion that I had not anticipated at the outset of this study. The topic of ethnicity became a significant aspect of the program that influenced how youth experienced life skills. In the following figure, all subthemes below the Lessons Learned theme that related to the issue of ethnicity have been combined under one heading entitled Lessons Learned: Ethnic Considerations.



Figure 5.2 What aspects of the program facilitate the life skill education experience?

Fostering a Fun Atmosphere. The ability to create an atmosphere that was enjoyable for youth to take part in was crucial to the success of the program. Due to the drop-in nature of the program, youth did not have to show any sort of commitment if they did not chose to. If they disliked the program, they simply would not show up. As a program leader, I had to carefully plan and create activities that allowed youth to practice life skills, but also kept them actively engaged and wanting to come back each week. Judging from the consistent attendance of the group and the ability to attract newcomers throughout the year, the program successfully accomplished this task. Youth expressed their enjoyment explicitly in the interview, claiming that the program was fun, they felt free, comfortable, and could be social with friends. The establishment of a fun yet educational atmosphere was an aspect of the program that positively influenced the youths' life skill education experience.

Fostering an Inclusive Environment. Myself along with the other leaders sought to develop a non-judgmental, caring, and welcoming environment within the program. As a group we put a great deal of effort into making each of the youth feel valued and included in all activities regardless of skill level, gender, race, age, etc. We made an effort to include all within every activity. This inclusion helped to promote an atmosphere of equality and respect within the group where all members felt valued.

A variety of activities and opportunities were presented. For example we offered mainstream sports such as basketball but also made sure to offer alternative activities such as cooperative games or fitness. In doing so, it created opportunities for youth to find activities that they could participate and experience success. This participation and success helped to build competence and confidence amongst youth leading to an overall increase in self-esteem.

The inclusive atmosphere was not due solely to the efforts of the leaders. The youth of the program played a major role in it's establishment. The nature of the group was very welcoming and this is documented within the data. Several instances show their ability to welcome new leaders and members with open arms and acceptance.

It was interesting to note how new youth responded when first exposed to the group and atmosphere of the program. New youth seemed to gain a level of comfort within the group quickly and were helped by more established members of the group. Beyond this, it seemed that these new members quickly gained an

understanding of the program. This suggests that the inclusive environment of the program is quite apparent and strong even to those who enter as outsiders.

Overall, this inclusive atmosphere was important in establishing a positive learning environment where youth feel valued as individuals, were able to achieve success, and build confidence in themselves.

Fostering Emotional & Physical Safety. My own reflective responses suggest that a great deal of effort went into fostering an environment where youth felt physically and emotionally safe. I made an effort to take on the role of caring adult by providing time for each individual, making them feel valued, and listening to their issues or concerns. I genuinely cared about each of the youth and as a result, was able to establish a strong rapport and trust with them.

Several of the youth echoed this sentiment when speaking with them one-on-one. Youth suggested that within other environments (home, school, etc) they are usually quiet and did not talk, however when they were at the program they felt comfortable and loved to talk. Comments like these were a testament to the inclusive and safe environment that was established with the group. With regard to their life skill education, this helped to create an atmosphere where youth felt safe to struggle through activities, conflicts, or issues without feeling embarrassed or vulnerable. Sometimes practicing or discussing these life skills could be difficult therefore feeling emotionally safe to struggle and even fail was a very necessary component to the learning process. This safety was one of the key aspects of the

program that contributed to the positive life skill education experience for these youth.

Pride. An aspect that contributed to the establishment of a positive environment was the pride that I personally developed toward the youth and the pride they came to develop in their own accomplishments. As I came to know the youth, I began to understand them and their personal backgrounds. These were a great group of teens that came from caring families with strong values. As I got to know them individually, I learned of their strengths and weaknesses and also witnessed their successes and failures both within and outside of the program.

Over the course of the program, I became personally invested in and connected to this group. I felt like they were my kids and felt a tremendous amount of pride in helping them grow and learn. When I reflect back upon my time within the program, I am amazed to see that the kids who struggled with issues of respect initially were the same kids that served as such tremendous leaders at the Unity Games.

The pride that I felt toward the group motivated me to put so much effort and care into this program. It also became contagious, as I genuinely celebrated the accomplishments of the group; they came to develop a sense of pride and confidence in their own abilities. The data was littered with examples of the youth and myself feeling a sense of pride that motivated us to work harder and improve. Pride was an aspect of the program that influenced the life skills education experience by motivating both myself and youth to continue to learn and improve.

Relational Time. Relational time was an aspect of the program that helped to create an environment in which youth could positively experience this life skill education. During this informal social time, I got to know the youth individually. I was given a glimpse into their lives that helped me to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for each of them. This relational time provided the opportunity to establish an environment where youth felt cared for, included, and safe to be themselves. During this time I would lend an ear or offer advice to youth. I learned of their struggles, their dreams, and what really made them tick. It also provided me with the opportunity to address any issues within the program to ensure that youth always felt safe and included.

During the interview, I was surprised to hear that, for most youth, the relational time that we got during our walks to and from the gym was their favorite aspect of the program. The youth stated that they enjoyed the time to talk and joke around with leaders and peers. I was surprised that something that seemed so subtle had such an impact on the youth in the program.

This relational time was vital to the establishment of the positive learning environment within the program. The quality relational time created opportunities to establish all of the different aspects of the program that made it so special. It provided a chance to have fun, include everyone, and make each individual feel safe and cared for. Without doing all of these things, a positive atmosphere could not develop within the program and the youths' experience with life skill education is impacted significantly.

Lessons Learned: Ethnic Considerations

Over the duration of the program the subject of ethnicity became very apparent and could not be ignored. This became a major aspect of the program that influenced the life skill education experience significantly. When I initially set out to investigate this program, I did not imagine that ethnicity would emerge as such a huge aspect of the program.

When looking at the participant data, it was relatively obvious to notice that the majority of youth in the program were African-Canadian while myself and the other leaders were white. Beyond this, a majority of youth practiced the Islamic faith. It was clear that I was working with a group who's ethnic and cultural background differed significantly from my own. This could be seen as a potential problem for a program however, based on the data in this study, our program ran quite successfully and was thoroughly enjoyed by youth. As the program leader, I learned many lessons with regards to providing a program for youth whose backgrounds differed from my own. Within our program, we were able to successfully establish a positive environment where life skill learning could occur. This motivated me to explore the topic of ethnicity as it relates to the experience of minority youth, specifically African-Canadian youth, within educational settings.

Minority Youth within the Canadian Education System. Canadian society prides itself on being a cultural mosaic, where the respective cultures of its peoples

combine together to create a society that value and celebrate difference. In education, Canada possesses an official policy of multiculturalism where ideally, “...all youth, regardless of colour, race, ethnicity, and citizenship/immigrant status, should be able to fully and equally participate in schooling activities in ways that enable them to realize the educational and occupational goals to which they aspire” (James, 2005, p. 9).

A prevalent idea in Canadian society is that any youth is free to dream as big as they can. The intention is that no youth should ever be denied their dreams based on their background. However, this is not always the case. As James (2005) continues, “Contrary to the promise and “good intention” of Canada’s multiculturalism policy, individuals are identified by ethnicity and race, and this in part determines their opportunities, as well as their educational and occupational outcomes” (p. 9).

Although, we wish that all youth were free to pursue any educational or occupational dream, there are still a multitude of barriers that marginalize these youth, making this pursuit more difficult. These barriers are engrained within the school system (within school programming, educational materials, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches) and contribute to youth’s disengagement from the schooling process, poor educational performance, lower self-concept, poor educational choices and fewer youth making it to high education (James, 2005).

It is suggested that a person’s ability to succeed in society is dependant on the level of cultural capital they possess. Cultural capital as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, is a set of resources (e.g. attitudes, behaviours, preferences) and powers that individuals derive from the structures of society (e.g. education, economics,

politics) that enable them to experience success (James, 2005; Eitle & Eitle, 2002). Youth can acquire these resources through the socialization process from their families, schools, and communities. However, the socialization process occurs differently for minority groups (Spence, 1999). All families (regardless of ethnicity) seek to educate their children on the skills necessary for success in society. Minority parents are given the added challenge to educate youth on values and norms that are seen as necessary adaptations to ensuring success in an ethnically oppressive society (Spence, 1999). These families must pass on a certain level of cultural capital in the form of attitudes and behaviours that enable youth to navigating through the structures of society successfully. For immigrant families this issue is compounded, as parents (particularly new arrivals) often possess little cultural capital that can be passed on to their children (James, 2005). In other words, immigrant families have less knowledge concerning what it takes to be successful in society if they have just become a part of it themselves. Due to their role as new Canadians, immigrants also possess less cultural capital in other areas such as social, political, and economic power.

Youth in the program are at a disadvantage due to their position as visible minorities and also as members of newly immigrated Canadian families. These youth came from families who often struggled financially and possessed little political or social power. As new members of society themselves, some parents were unable to teach these youth some of the skills they needed to be successful in Canadian society. However, one skill that seemed to be universally encouraged amongst youth in the program was education. Youth came from families that put

emphasis on academic achievement as this was viewed as a way for youth to achieve success and get ahead in Canadian society. There were several times when youth felt pressure to skip the program or sat out for some of it because they had schoolwork to do (a frequent example was Mahdi who often missed program because he felt he needed to do work). This view is consistent with the findings of Spence (1999) who's study of African-Canadian students found that youth and parents both viewed education as the key to getting ahead in society.

However, despite this emphasis on education, many young African-Canadian youth struggle to find success within the education system. Spence's (1999) interviews with African-Canadian youth found that, "Almost all the participants in [the] study stated that racism existed in the school system and mentioned that insensitivity on the part of their teachers toward cultural and racial differences" (p. 80). This racism creates an additional hurdle that minority youth must overcome in order to achieve academic success. Although racism sometimes occurred openly in the lives of youth, it usually occurred in less obvious ways. Much of the racism experienced was ingrained in the policies, practices, and pedagogy within the education system, commonly referred to as institutional racism. The existence of institutional racism may seem like an issue of the past, but for the youth in Spence's study and an abundance of other minority youth, racism is an issue that is very much real today. This racism often leads to a feeling of alienation amongst African-Canadian youth within the school system.

Carl James (2005) commented that, during the 1980's when he first began to work with immigrant youth, "This was a time when there was a significant increase

in the number of immigrant youths from the Caribbean entering the school system- a system that was ill-prepared to address their academic, social, cultural, and familial needs and issues” (p. 3). Within the Canadian education system today, a growing number of students are emigrating from Muslim countries that practice the Islamic faith (such as Sudan). These newly immigrated youth, like those James mentioned in his study, face an education system that is ill equipped to address their academic, social, cultural, and familial needs and issues. These youth face a sort of “dual-alienation” due to both their position as racial minorities as well as their religious minority status (Zine, 2001). Not only did youth have to battle stereotypes associated with being African-Canadian, but they also have had to battle stereotypes associated with being Muslim. Many educators and administrators lack understanding of the Islamic faith. This lack of understanding bred fear or “Islamophobia” within many schools (Zine, 2006). As a result, youth not only faced institutionalized racism and insensitive teachers that lacked understanding of African-Canadians, but also those who lacked understanding of the Islamic faith. This misunderstanding creates significant barriers to the educational success of African-Canadian, Muslim youth.

Muslim Students Experience in Schools. Jasmin Zine (2001) conducted “an ethnographic analysis of the schooling experiences of Muslim youth in Canada who are committed to maintaining an Islamic lifestyle despite the pressures of conformity to the dominant culture” (p. 399). The participants in this study were all subjected to the dual-alienation that came with being both a racial and religious

minority in the Canadian school system whose norms often conflicted with their cultural and secular values. Youth faced social pressures from peers at school that conflicted with their religious practices such as dating, premarital sex, and alcohol use (Zine, 2001). Youth also spoke of a yearning desire to fit in with those around them (Zine, 2001). These factors create a schooling environment that can be difficult for youth to navigate. When it came to interactions at school, youth within Zine's study faced many of the same issues as youth in our program. Older youth within our program felt pressured to conform to the dominant society with regard to dating and alcohol use. They were often curious about the social lives of the leaders and whether we engaged in dating or alcohol use.

Youth within Zine's study found significant difficulty negotiating some of the Eurocentric practices ingrained in the school system. Youth and their parents had to negotiate their involvement in un-Islamic practices such as Halloween or Valentine's Day that were common within all schools (Zine, 2001). Again this experience was similar to that of the youth in our program. Some youth in the program practiced Islam but attended a local Catholic school near the community. These youth had to navigate their own religious beliefs with the constant exposure to teachings of another faith.

Female youth faced further difficulty when having to negotiate the pressure of wearing a Hijab (Zine, 2001). Many females felt pressure to remove the Hijab in order to fit in with the dominant culture. Within our own program, it was interesting to note the variation of adherence to certain practices of the Islamic faith. Although all youth were Muslim, some females wore the Hijab, while others did not. The views

toward subjects like dating and alcohol use also showed the influence of the teachings of their faith but also the dominant culture that they were a part of. These youth were all engaged in the active process of negotiating their religious beliefs within Canadian society.

To cope with the conflict between religion and societal pressures, many youth felt they had to make concessions in order to fit in (Zine, 2001). Similar to youth in our program, youth in Zine's study had varying levels of adherence to the Muslim faith. Often youth would remain stringent with regard to dating, alcohol use, and premarital sex, but loosen their stand on areas such as gender mixing. The Islamic faith has strict guidelines with regard to mixing and physical contact between members of the opposite sex (Zine, 2001). Contact between youth of the opposite sex is common within the dominant culture; therefore Muslim youth found this was an area that they could make some sacrifice without jeopardizing their faith. In our program, contact between males and females was common. Youth seemed very comfortable coming into contact with the opposite sex during the activities that we engaged in. Perhaps this reflected the closeness of their families in the broader community.

There was only one instance that the issue of gender mixing seemed to be evident. When we concluded the program, we said goodbye to the youth and many of them gave us hugs. There was another male leader, two female leaders, and myself present. A majority of the female youth were comfortable giving myself and the other male leader hugs however some were just comfortable with shaking hands or giving a high-five. However, all female participants were comfortable with

hugging the female leaders because this posed no threat to their religious standards of conduct. Youth constantly had to negotiate the conflicts between the dominant culture of society and their religious beliefs. Often when they did not conform, youth felt alienated or marginalized by their peers. This alienation was further heightened by the discrimination and institutionalized racism that youth experienced from teachers and school administration.

Discrimination and Institutionalized Racism toward Muslim Students in School. For Muslim youth, there exists a concerning level of discrimination and institutionalized racism within their schooling experience. Muslim students are sometimes deemed “difficult” by teachers and many educators experience Islamophobia (Merry, 2005). This racism is due to educators’ inexperience and misunderstanding of the Islamic religion and Muslim practices. Female Muslim youth experienced significant discrimination within the school setting. These females described receiving messages of inferiority or patronizing attitudes when interacting with teachers (Zine, 2001). Females felt that teachers believed that because they wore the Hijab and were identified as Muslim, they were treated as lesser individuals and were somehow less academically able. These ignorant views toward Muslim students created a stereotype that these youth struggled academically. Many Muslim students, “...reported being evaluated and recommended for placement in lower academic streams on the basis of what they perceived as the low expectations of teachers and guidance counselors for Muslims and certain other racially minoritized groups” (Zine, 2001, p. 413). This low

academic tracking was experienced frequently by Muslim students and was a result of stereotyped low expectations from educators (Merry, 2005; Zine, 2001; Zine, 2006). Youth felt their educational aspirations were not taken seriously leading to distrust and anger toward guidance counselors (Zine, 2001). I recalled sensing a similar feeling of distrust between the leaders and Dalia when we looked to empower youth and give them control over the learning process. I got the sense that she did not believe us at first and was hesitant to jump right into the process. Perhaps this tentativeness was a result of previous negative experiences with educators.

A considerable amount of discrimination has been directed toward Muslim females who wear Hijabs. Many females regarded their interactions with teachers, “as framed by negative assumptions that they were oppressed at home and that Islam did not value education for women” (Zine, 2006, p. 244). Often wearing a Hijab brought on these assumptions. Within the dominant culture, the act of wearing a hijab is seen as a symbol of gender inequality and incompatible with mainstream society (Zine, 2006). This oversimplified view lacks understanding behind the religious significance and multiple meanings for many females who choose to wear a hijab. Muslim students have been forced to remove articles of clothing with religious significance, including the hijab, by teachers and principals (Zine, 2001). Further, countries and provinces have even gone as far as banning the wearing of religious wear within publicly funded schools (Zine, 2006). This discrimination and racism, both subtle and overt, contributes negatively to the educational experience of Muslim youth in Canada. Muslim students must constantly

navigate conflicts between the dominant culture, their religious beliefs, and racial background within the schooling process. One area of school life where these conflicts arose frequently was within Physical Education.

Discrimination and Institutionalized Racism toward Muslim Students in

PE. An area where many Muslim youth experience institutionalized racism is within the Physical Education setting. Though educators and administrators may not intend to subject these youth to racism, certain policies and customs associated with the PE classroom conflict with the practices of Muslim youth. Carroll and Hollinshead wrote an interesting piece of research concerning the existence of institutional racism toward Muslim students within many PE classrooms (Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993). Students often suffered when classroom or teacher rules conflicted with their cultural practices. Though the study is based in the UK, these are the same issues many Canadian Muslim youth face. With regard to dress code, many PE programs require students to wear a uniform. There have been issues with regard to Muslim students needing to wear culturally appropriate attire while still adhering to physical education dress code. Specifically, there have often been issues with female students' need to wear the traditional Hijab during PE class (several females in our own program wear this traditional clothing). Another area of conflict regarded showering after PE. School policies that required all youth to shower following PE class conflicted with many students' cultures with regard to exposing oneself. Students expressed feeling public humiliation and shame during these conflicts. They also felt that teachers needed to talk to them more and gain a better

understanding of their religion (Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993). Traditional policies and approaches to PE failed to serve the needs of youth in this UK study.

Unfortunately, youth within our own program experienced similar institutionalized racism locally. An example came from our own program that showed how institutional racism can occur when those with power lack understanding of cultural practices. When we brought the teens to the university to go swimming, many of the girls swam without their Hijabs. Due to the location and limited viewing area at the university pool, the girls felt they could take off the Hijab without offending anyone or bringing shame on their families. The pool at the local fitness centre did not offer the same protection that the university pool did. If a member of their community were to see them without a Hijab, it would be very shameful for themselves and their families. As a result they rarely used the community facility and preferred the university pool.

I personally dropped the ball and was ignorant to the needs of the youth in my own program when planning the gifts for youth at the Unity Games. As part of the experience, each youth received a “Swag bag” of free items including pens, pencils, skipping ropes, etc. Included in this bag was a free swim pass to the fitness centre pool that was mentioned previously. Having gotten caught up in planning the event, I had not realized that many of the teens receiving this swim pass were not comfortable using it. They had received something that was more or less useless because it created conflict with their cultural practices. It was a minor oversight on my part, but my failure to take into account the youths’ cultural and religious practices is an example of how easily a small detail of a program can disadvantage a

minority group. This scenario highlights the importance of careful planning when it comes to working with youth from minority backgrounds. Luckily, this type of oversight was rare within the program and myself and the other leaders took special care in our pedagogical approach to take into consideration the unique cultural and religious needs of the youth in the program. My intention is that by highlighting my mistakes, I can help others running similar programs to take into account these concerns.

Lack of African-Canadian & Muslim Role Models in PE. This institutionalized racism has made it difficult for minority youth to succeed in Canada's education system. The marginalization of minority youth has had a negative influence on the education of these youth and ultimately has led to fewer making it to college or university (James, 2005). The cost of post secondary education is a major deterrent for marginalized youth (Spence, 1999). Both of these issues were evident within the community that the teens resided in. Many families in the community struggled to support their children attending post secondary education. From my observations and conversations with program youth, there were few older youth in the community that attended a post-secondary institution. However, within the program, there were two youth already enrolled in college (Badra & Amal) and another who was enrolling in the upcoming fall (Rachel). Despite financial strain, these families had enabled their youth to pursue higher education. Beyond this, younger youth all had aspirations to receive a higher form of education and expressed this during informal discussions. This is again reflective of

the level of importance that was placed upon education by these families. Again education was seen as the tool that could provide youth with some level of social mobility.

To help inspire African-Canadian youth to pursue higher education, Spence (1999) suggests that, “Introducing and providing Black role models whenever possible will introduce Black youth to other career avenues” (p. 113). By exposing youth to role models they can identify with, they may be inspired to pursue similar careers (Spence, 1999). Within the program, the effort was made to provide positive role models for youth in the form of myself, the other program leaders, and Unity Games leaders. All of these leaders were pursuing higher education at a university (mostly in Physical Education). By exposing youth to these successful role models, youth may be inspired to attend university to pursue a similar career. However, there was one glaring issue with the role models that program youth were exposed to; nearly all of them were White. While youth did connect with leaders, the program failed to offer them a true role model in the form of an African-Canadian or Muslim leader. This was an unfortunate reality that came to light during the program. It highlights the need for the Canadian education system to address the barriers that minorities must navigate in order to achieve post-secondary education.

Program Implications

During the focus group interview, youth claimed that they really enjoyed coming to the program and participating because it was “fun” and “different” from

their typical schooling. It is safe to say that a positive learning environment was established where youth could safely learn and practice life skills. So what made this program successful? How did we overcome the difference in ethnicity between members? A lot of it has to do with the personalities of the youth who participated but it also was heavily influenced by the pedagogical approach and values of those leading the program.

Approaching Ethnic and Cultural Differences. Working with a group of youth from a different cultural background than my own was a huge learning process for me as an educator. As Hellison (2011) states, “Being prepared for and being able to accept cultural differences is essential in becoming an effective program leader of students whose backgrounds differ from one’s own” (p. 113). When I first started the program, I had no idea what to expect. I was this loud, enthusiastic, young, white guy entering a community of mostly African-Canadian youth and trying to get them to run around and play games (they must have thought I was insane). As we came to understand one another, we began to appreciate and celebrate our differences. At times our cultural views did not align (ex. the approach to communicating in a group) but we approached these differences with open-minds and genuine interest. We were comfortable talking about our differences and learning about our respective cultures. Youth would joke about my sunburns and I joked that one of the girls “was the first girl I’d seen dunk wearing a hijab!” We were sensitive to our differences and we approached them openly and honestly through

discussion. Our ability to own our cultural backgrounds and appreciate others contributed to creating a positive learning environment for youth.

In the works of Spence (1999) and Carroll and Hollinshead (1993), African-Canadian and Muslim youth being interviewed claimed that there needed to be an increase in teacher sensitivity and understanding of minority students. Youth felt that teachers needed to talk to them more and gain a better understanding of their religion (Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993). As stated previously, leaders made an effort to understand and appreciate each youth individually as a means of establishing strong relationships. This included gaining an understanding of their cultural backgrounds. In doing so, we created open dialogue concerning cultural differences within the group. We discussed our perspectives openly, fostering an atmosphere of acceptance within the group. This open and accepting environment allowed youth to achieve a feeling of comfort within the program. As a result, the comfort level that youth felt allowed them to express discomfort with certain activities openly. If there ever arose a situation where youth felt uncomfortable, they could state this. This allowed us to easily alter activities to keep everyone happy and engaged each week. The leaders of this program took interest in the culture and ethnicity of the youth in the program. We acknowledged that these differences were not inherently problematic but topics that could be negotiated openly together. We approached the topic sensitively and created an atmosphere where this type of discussion could occur freely.

The education of minority youth needs to be student centered (Spence, 1999). This is a staple of TPSR style programming (Hellison, 2011) and was evident

throughout the pedagogy of the program. Spence (1999) suggests that educators must actively work to, "...eradicate the inequitable distribution of power and resources" (p. 100). Minority youth have less access to power and resources due to their marginalized position in society. Within the program, we sought to combat this inequity through the empowerment of youth.

Empowerment Among Minority Youth. The subject of empowerment becomes even more important when considering that the majority of the youth within the program come from minority populations, specifically African-Canadian and Muslim backgrounds. As Braithwaite and James suggest, within the traditional education system these youth often experience discrimination (Braithwaite & James, 1996). If unaddressed it can lead to alienation from the schooling process. Within the program, we sought to create an educational environment where youth were excited to participate and engage in physical activity. Youth were provided with opportunities to make choices within the program. Beginning with simply choosing equipment and progressing to planning and executing activities for peers and young children, youth were empowered during the learning process. By allowing youth to become empowered within the process, youth took control of it and developed a sense of ownership over it. This empowerment shifted power from the leaders of the program to the youth. The attempt was to decrease the power dynamic so that youth felt that they were in control of the learning process. This was successfully accomplished and led to youths' continued motivation to participate and engage.

The role of empowerment was also key in addressing cultural differences specifically with regard to dress code. As mentioned, many youth wore a Hijab during the program. Carroll & Hollinshead's (1993) work found that students often suffered when classroom or teacher rules conflicted with their cultural practices. These conflicts arose specifically with regard to dress code and showers. Students expressed feeling public humiliation and shame during these conflicts (Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993). Within our program, we were fortunate to have the freedom to create rules and establish an atmosphere that was centered on the youth participating. The atmosphere of the program was established for the youth by the youth thus helping ensure that it did not conflict with their cultural practices. That being said, we did not have a dress code within the program and youth were often responsible for picking or planning the activities of the day. By providing opportunities for empowerment, youth were able to tailor the program to their needs. If youth with Muslim backgrounds are controlling the learning process, they have the ability to avoid situations that made them uncomfortable or conflict with their cultural practices. When it came to programming or planning events (such as going swimming) care was taken to ensure that the needs of the youth were taken into account. However, in the case that leaders missed something, youth were free to express concerns about anything that conflicted with their cultural practices.

Within this study, careful pedagogy and strategies to empower youth helped to motivate and inspire them within the educational process. Research needs to continue to investigate the experience of religious, racial, and ethnic minority youth

within the education system. Overall, the ability of this program to empower youth and establish caring relationships is what made it successful and truly special for those participating. This program exemplifies the necessity of these two program aspects in helping facilitate youths' positive experience with life skills.

For the Love of the Game: The Appeal of Basketball for Program Youth.

Another interesting aspect of the program that arose during the course of this study was youth's enjoyment of the game of basketball. This preference interested me as program leader and I felt it deserved further investigation. Within the program, there was a preference from nearly all the youth to play basketball whenever possible. There were varying levels of ability in the group but everyone was always enthusiastic about getting the opportunity to play an organized game. When there was free time, many youth chose to shoot hoops over other activities.

I was interested by this preference in the program. Basketball was the sport that was held in the highest regard amongst youth in the community. With most youth coming from Sudanese backgrounds, I was interested that basketball was considered their favorite sport to play. Basketball does have a foothold in Sudanese culture (there are a few Sudanese players playing professionally in the National Basketball Association), but most of these youth have grown up here in Canada, so why did they view basketball so highly?

Carl James (2005), an expert in the area of minority youth participation in sport, noticed a similar phenomenon during his early work as a youth worker in a

community of Black-Caribbean youth, most of whom were newly arrived immigrants. James ran a weekly drop-in activity program strikingly similar in structure to the program in this study. He noticed a similar phenomenon with regard to the preference of basketball amongst the Black-Caribbean youth who attend his program. Despite growing up and experiencing traditional Caribbean sports like soccer and cricket, these youth also preferred to play basketball during the program. For many of these youth, basketball was a way to tolerate school and have their presence at school recognized. It gave them a chance to display their abilities in front of their peers and also practice their skills in order to maintain their positions on their school teams (James, 2005).

For youth in this study, the program offered similar benefits. The program was a chance to escape the mundane environment of school and participate in something enjoyable. It offered them the chance to showcase their skills in front of their peers (who's opinions they valued considerably). Beyond this, many youth were playing for their elementary, secondary, or college basketball teams and this program offered them another opportunity to practice their skills. These youth occupied minority positions in society, basketball was a culturally valued activity that many youth viewed as a way to gain recognition and fit in. The situation of youth within this study reflects those of Caribbean background in James' study. We lack a clear understanding of why minority and immigrant youth choose to participate in certain sports over others. The cultural value placed on certain activities, particularly basketball, is something that deserves further investigation.

Pedagogical Practice. Throughout this research, I have attempted to highlight exactly how I went about delivering this program. As a young educator and researcher, it was a challenge for me to successfully embed these life skills within the activities we did each session. To address this issue, I showcased exactly how I brought the TPSR approach to life within the Methods section. I provided concrete examples and activities that others can use to deliver similar programs (see Chapter 3, Fig 3.0).

I have also done my best to showcase my struggles and lessons learned while delivering this program openly and honestly. This program has been an incredible learning process for me as a life skills educator. I struggled mightily at times during this process and grew significantly as a result. Many of the dilemmas and challenges I faced are common to anyone attempting to lead such a program. The “Lessons Learned” portion of Chapter 4 impacted me significantly as an educator. It was during these times that I gained deeper understanding. I hope that through my struggles and reflections, I can help others delivering this type of education.

Research Implications

Throughout the literature there has been a call for a shift in the approach that universities have taken toward their scholarly inquiry. Experts suggest that research needs to better serve the community through further integration of service and scholarship (Martinek, Hellison, & Walsh, 2004). It is suggested that universities have a civic responsibility to help address “real-world” problems that afflict the

communities in which they are a part of (Walsh, 2006). This is easier said than done, as it is often hard to meet the needs of both practitioners and academics. As Martinek et al. (2004) suggest, “Academics want proof; practitioners want something that works in their classroom...” (p.409). This study is further evidence that we could have both. Through careful planning and delivery, this program was able to provide a service to youth while also producing results through an approach grounded in theory.

As Gould and Carson (2008) claim, “Given the infancy of the scientific study of life skills development through sport, there is a need for more and better research.” (p. 68). They urge that research needs to be conducted qualitatively to broaden the knowledge base in this area. Further, Gould and Carson (2008) suggest that qualitative research will prove especially helpful when investigating new areas of life skill development. They state, “We know so little about life skills development through sport that describing the conditions and experiences of those involved is essential” (p. 69). This is exactly where the current study has contributed. Through this detailed account, the journey of the educator, youth, and group as a whole was highlighted. The conditions and experiences of all those involved in the program was described in detail. This description can help further the knowledge base of those investigating life skill education in both theory and practice.

As a researcher, I was committed to the idea of producing qualitative research that could contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the use of physical activity to teach life skills while also providing something that was

practically useful. This study is proof that, though challenging, research that contributes to both academia and the community can be accomplished.

Life Skills Research. With regard to life skills, TPSR literature suggests that youth within these types of programs showed improvement in *self-control* (DeBusk & Hellison, 1989; Georgiadis, 1990; Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Kahne et al., 2001, Kallusky, 2000; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992), *effort* (Compagnone, 1995; Hellison, 1978; Wright, 2001; Wright & Li, 2009), *leadership* (Walsh, Ozaeta & Wright, 2010), *helping others* (Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001), *self-worth* (Hellison, 1978; Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992), *self-direction* (Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001), *teamwork/cooperation* (Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001), *communication skills* (Cutforth, 1997; Kallusky, 2000), *interpersonal relations* (Cutforth, 1997; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001; Wright et al., 2004), *sense of responsibility* (Compagnone, 1995; Kallusky, 2000), and *commitment* (Schilling, 2001).

The findings of this study coincided with many of the life skills listed above. In agreement with TPSR literature surrounding *responsibility* (Compagnone, 1995; Kallusky, 2000), youth within this program showed a strong understanding of what it meant to be responsible and took responsibility for themselves and others. Further, they demonstrated this sense of responsibility in their actions within the program and the Unity Games.

The TPSR literature concerning leadership suggests that youth within these programs gain a deeper understanding and capacity for *leadership* (Walsh, Ozaeta & Wright, 2010) and *helping others* (Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001). The findings of this study would suggest that youth also were given opportunities to further develop these skills. Initially, youth demonstrated an understanding of what it meant to be a leader through their comments in discussion and reflective responses. Youth were then given the opportunity to practice and apply these skills at the Unity Games event. Responses from youth suggest that this was a very eye-opening and impactful learning experience. By providing youth with opportunities to discuss, refine, and practice their leadership skills, they could further develop them and grow as individuals.

Communication skills were also suggested to have further developed through participation in TPSR style programs (Cutforth, 1997; Kallusky, 2000). Findings in this study suggest that youth were able to further practice these skills specifically listening skills. These listening skills seemed to be linked closely to the concept of respect within the program. Proper listening skills frequently appeared within youth responses as a sign of showing respect. These skills were emphasized early and often within the program and comments such as this reflected youths' understanding of what good communication required.

The life skill of *effort* is said to have improved amongst youth involved in similar TPSR programs (Compagnone, 1995; Hellison, 1978; Wright, 2001; Wright & Li, 2009). This study found that youth possessed a good understanding of effort and how they could show it through participation in the program. Youth not only

understood and demonstrated the concept of effort but responses highlight their self-awareness. In understanding what it meant to put forth effort, youth demonstrated the ability to engage in self-evaluation. As Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living” (Anderson, 1967, p. 10), meaning evaluation and examination are key to gaining understanding. In this regard, youth demonstrated the ability to critically evaluate their actions and develop further understand themselves.

Finally, the life skills of *teamwork/cooperation* were said to be developed through TPSR programs (Hellison & Georgiadis, 1992; Wright, 2001). The results of this study supported these findings as youth demonstrated an understanding of what teamwork and cooperation meant. Beyond this, they also demonstrated how they could engage in these types of behaviours within the program activities. Responses suggest that youth understood the concept of teamwork/cooperation and also how this could translate into action within the program.

Again, as a final comment I just want to be clear that I am not suggesting these youth enter the program with no knowledge of life skills. While I cannot explicitly say that youth learned all they needed to know about life skills through involvement in this program, providing them with the opportunity to practice life skills in a positive learning environment can go a long way in helping their development. The program helped facilitate this learning process through discussion, action, and critical reflection.

Pedagogical Research.

TPSR Program Elements. As a program leader and educator, I played a role in facilitating the life skills education process for these youth. I did my best to include best practices from many of the experts within this field. Reflecting back on the program, I am confident in the ability of the program to follow the TPSR framework and that of other successful programs within the broader realm of positive youth development. Let's begin with the core values of the program as found in the TPSR book (Hellison, 2011 p. 22) and how they were represented within this program;

Putting kids first – Exemplified by my own approach of “Kids are sacred; games are not” meaning that the needs of the youth were top priority when planning and delivering the program.

Promoting human decency – The caring atmosphere of the program promoted positive interactions between all members of the group.

Holistic self-development – The program was based on providing opportunities to be physically active. However, a holistic approach to youth development was taken by focusing on the social, cognitive, and emotional aspects of each youth's development through content and pedagogy.

Embracing these values as a way of being – As mentioned previously, these values within the TPSR framework align with my own as an educator leading to their implication naturally.

Beyond this, I feel that as the program facilitator, I successfully applied the TPSR structure to this program. As Hellison himself suggested, the TPSR approach is

not a strict model but a framework that should be molded to the needs of the program and its participants (Hellison, 2011). With some minor tweaks (such as some extra relational time walking to and from the gym) we made the structure work for the needs of the youth and the program itself. Similarly, the program emphasized all of the levels of responsibility over the course of its duration. Again, the levels were tweaked to best work for the teens in the program. Some levels received more emphasis than others depending on the needs of the youth and the goals of the program. For example, in order to prepare for taking on a leadership role at the Unity Games, we began discussing the concept of leadership very early on.

Back in Chapter 2, I presented a list of common pedagogical criteria for successful programs. This list was as follows:

- Treat youth as resources to be developed- building on their strengths
- Focus on developing the whole person- the social, emotional, cognitive and physical
- Respect the individuality of each youth
- Empower youth
- Give youth clear expectations based on a strong set of values
- Help youth envision possible futures
- Provide physically and emotionally safe environment
- Small program numbers and long-term participation to increase sense of belonging and membership
- Maintain a local connection in the community

Provide courageous and persistent leadership when facing obstacles

Provide significant contact with a caring adult

(Hellison & Cutforth, 1997)

When examining this list and looking back on the program, I am confident in saying that this particular program adhered to all of the above criteria. Within this list, there are a few criteria that contributed significantly to the success of the program in delivering life skill education through physical activity.

Relationships. The first is the concept of being relational with kids or as the list describes it, providing significant contact with a caring adult. As Walsh (2006) suggests,

“Establishing meaningful pedagogical relationships is a cornerstone in any youth development program. These relationships engage participants and allow for ownership in the program. When implemented effectively, TPSR strategies appear to cultivate a positive environment that creates self-growth and concern for others” (p. 47).

The establishment of rapport and a trusting relationship is key to creating the type of positive environment in which learning can take place. Petitpas, Cornelius, and Van Raalte, reinforce this concept when looking at both the Play it Smart and The First Tee sport/life skill education programs. Mentors in these programs receive specific instruction regarding relationship-building skills (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, 2008). The fact that leaders receive specific training

in relationship building reinforces the view that rapport between educator and learner is vital for any learning to occur.

Catherine Ennis, an expert in the field of positive youth development has used a similar approach to educating youth, entitled Sport for Peace. Within her research findings, Ennis and her colleagues (1999) reiterate the need for a trusting relationship when suggesting that youth, “are unwilling to learn when teachers remain aloof...and refuse to spend time with students or express interest in their lives” (Ennis, Loftus, McCauley, Mensch, Satina, Solomon, 1999). Myself and the other leaders within the program did our best to learn about each individual and express sincere interest in their lives. Further, Ennis suggests that youth are more willing to embrace the theme of the program when they describe the learning environment as reflecting a sense of family (Ennis, 2000). This family environment led to youth treating each other with respect and developing a sense of trust (Ennis et al., 1999). This is the type of environment that was strived for within the program and the youth responded positively to each other as well. Throughout the program, leaders worked to make each individual feel cared for and special. As a result, a culture of caring developed, helping to create a positive learning environment for life skills education to occur.

Attributes that Foster Quality Relationships with Learners. As Hellison (2011) wisely suggests, establishing meaningful relations with kids, “...is still too often perceived as a mixture of artistry and charisma...” (p. 25). Establishing relationships comes easier to some educators than others, however successful

program leaders should strive to express certain qualities and skills including sense of purpose, listening and caring, being genuine, self-reflection, sense of humour and playful spirit, and cultural respect.

Sense of purpose according to Hellison (2011), "...is what matters most, what is most meaningful. It describes our vision and our primary values and beliefs" (p. 107). As the program leader, I vehemently believed in the importance of this program. I felt passionate toward it because what I was trying to teach was important for any youth to understand. This passion motivated me to persevere through the struggles or hardships and truly celebrate the successes and triumphs. This passion was evidenced throughout the data when I speak of the pride I felt toward the program and the youth.

Listening and caring involves respecting each individual as unique and treating them with dignity (Hellison, 2011). Throughout the program, I made a significant effort to really get to know the youth. I sincerely took interest in their lives and came to appreciate their individuality. The Relational Time within the program was used well to truly listen to youth and show interest in them as individuals, making them feel important and cared for. Youth described this time as their favorite aspect of the program because "it was fun" and they "got to talk", a testament to our ability to listen and care. The caring relationship that I embodied within the program helped contribute significantly to the positive learning environment.

Being genuine involves being oneself and personalizing one's beliefs (Hellison, 2011). Though challenging at times, I attempted to stay true to myself, and

the values of the program, despite some initial resistance by the youth. Beyond this, I also made an effort to express my humanity as a means of building rapport with youth. I am not always right. I make a lot of mistakes. I am willing to admit when I make mistakes and try to do better. Being willing to admit my mistakes went a long way in helping establish a comfortable learning environment. As an educator, if I was willing to try, fail, and try again as part of my own learning process then hopefully the youth could feel comfortable doing so as well.

Self-reflection was key to my own learning process within this program. As Hellison (2011) suggests, "Cultivating the habit of professional self-reflection by keeping a daily journal, by being open to criticism, and by making and evaluating personal change is perhaps the single most effective methods for improving all these qualities" (p. 111). The reflective journal, discussions with other leaders, and discussions with youth, all helped me to reflect, analyze, and improve the program and my own teaching strategies.

Having a sense of humour and playful spirit were crucial to the success of the program. This program was not easy at times; trying to teach these life skills could be draining. A sense of humour and a playful spirit were used to guard against burnout (Hellison, 2011). Some nights I would get in the car and just laugh, asking myself, "What the hell am I doing here?" other nights I would leave on a total high when it seemed as though youth were getting it. I spent a lot of time laughing off failures and struggles with the other leaders as we attempted to deliver this program. This helped us to stay positive and engaged in the process week after week. In maintaining this positive attitude, we were continually engaged in activities

and discussions with the youth creating better quality opportunities for them to learn.

Empowerment. As Miller, Bredemeier, and Shields (1997) suggest, “Educators cannot promote changes in personal attributes directly but only via organizing the environmental pole of experience” (p. 118). Through careful planning and pedagogy, educators can create opportunities for youth to develop life skills. These authors found that empowerment in the form of progressively shifting power and responsibility over the learning environment toward youth was influential in the life skill learning process (Miller, Bredemeier, & Shields 1997).

Within my own study, a great deal of effort was made to offer youth opportunities to be empowered. Within the program, an attempt was made to give youth choices during each session. These choices ranged from choosing equipment, to the types of activities we played, to the types of leadership roles they wished to take. The objective was to give youth control over their learning. To ensure this type of empowerment occurred, I followed the developmental continuum for youth empowerment suggested by Schilling, Martinek, and Tan (2001):

Students share their ideas and thoughts in the group meeting- youth were encouraged to participate in discussions, reinforcing the idea that they had a voice and opinion that was valued. Beyond this, youth were encouraged to offer their opinions openly as long as it was done in a respectful manner.

Students make decisions within the physical activity program- youth began to be empowered by simply selecting equipment or suggesting boundaries. As

time passed and youth gained responsibility, they were responsible for establishing rules and governing the games themselves.

Students engage in peer teaching and coaching – youth were given the opportunity to teach their peers activities or games within the program setting. Here they could practice and refine their leadership skills in a safe environment. Giving youth the opportunity to create and deliver their own games allowed them to be in control of the learning environment. This control of the learning process motivated them to engage within it.

Students take on leadership roles with younger kids (become cross-age leaders) – youth experienced a leadership role with younger children at the Unity Games. As mentioned previously, youth mentioned that this experience helped them understand the responsibilities of leaders as well as the positives and negatives that the position entails.

(Schilling, Martinek, & Tan, 2001; Hellison, Martinek, & Walsh, 2008)

Future Research

University-Community Connections. A strength of this program was the working relationship between the university and the organization responsible for facilitating all youth programs in the community. The missions of the organization and this project aligned closely, something that is vital to successful collaboration between universities and communities (Walsh, 2006). When working with this

organization's staff, I continuously felt supported in my efforts to deliver this program and gather research.

Through the after-school program and Unity Games event, youth were exposed to unique learning opportunities. These learning opportunities were based upon the latest research concerning life skills education. As a result of the strong partnership between the university and the community organizations, the latest research could be applied within the immediate community. Youth were able to benefit from this research directly. This is the bridge between research and real-world relevance that so many have called for in the research realm. Future research should continue to strive to make immediate real-world impact such as this.

Case suggested that university-community partnerships are crucial in helping to address some of the barriers associated with minority youth in the education system. He suggests that university-community partnerships can play a significant role in helping minority youth attain post-secondary education (Case, 1996). Often academic institutions are viewed as isolated and even intimidating by the communities around them. When youth are not given the opportunity to experience these institutions, these views prevail, making it less likely that they would ever seek further education in one of these places. Through this program, youth were given ample opportunity to experience the university campus, its facilities, and meet a multitude of student role models who attended the institution. Through exposure, it is hoped that the negative perception toward university

education can be disrupted, allowing youth to envision themselves as able to attain this level of education. Future research investigating the impact of these university-community partnerships on youth's views toward post-secondary education is needed.

A Shift in Focus. Jay Coakley wrote a critical piece regarding the role of sport in society and the automatic assumptions of its character building qualities (Coakley, 2002). There are two prevailing views regarding the use of sport to address deviance and violence amongst youth. The deficit view, states that sport is viewed as a deterrent where kids are taken away from negative influences. Here youth are viewed negatively as problems to be fixed. There is no focus on change or social justice. Social control and deficit reduction is the focus (this is NOT what I wanted in our program).

The second of Coakley's (2002) views, is that sport can be used to build leadership skills and as a form of social development. These types of programs build on strengths rather than reducing deficits. This is in agreement with the "strengths perspective" in positive youth development research (Lerner et al., 2002) and a key element of my own program. However, there is still no aim at addressing social justice or structural issues in society. The assumption is made that everything is fine the way it is and individuals need to adapt. Research suggests that playing sports does not decrease violence and deviance, rather participation combined with an emphasis on a philosophy of non-violence, respect for self and others, importance of fitness and control over self, confidence in physical skills and a sense of

responsibility will positively influence youth (Coakley, 2002). I would suggest that many elements of our program fall into this category as our focus was on individual development rather than addressing broader societal issues. We chose to focus on helping youth understand life skills and practice them as a means of dealing with societal issues instead of seeking to change these issues themselves.

Coakley (2002) suggests that “real problems” are not individual kids but pre-existing societal structures that put these kids at a disadvantage. As mentioned previously, for minority youth, these societal structures exert a considerable amount of influence on their daily lives. Youth activity programs need to focus on social justice and broader community development. He suggests the importance of several keys for programs:

- 1) Provide a safe environment for youth
- 2) Make youth feel personally valued
- 3) Encourage social connection
- 4) Encourage hope for the future
- 5) Encourage personal and political empowerment
- 6) *Address societal issues and social justice*

The program in this study included a majority of these elements. However, as stated, our focus was on individual development rather than broader societal issues. This would be the next progression for a life skills education program.

Within our program, the approach was to help youth further understand and practice certain life skills. The logic was that by further refining these skills, youth would be better equipped to deal with the societal issues they may face on a daily

basis. However, Coakley warns that if attention is focused solely on the individual and not on developing strategies for community development, meaningful social or economic transformation rarely occurs (Coakley, 2002). In hindsight, the focus of our program could have been adjusted to address some of the broader social issues that youth faced in their lives. The program successfully empowered youth within its confines, giving youth the opportunity to develop leadership skills and apply them. The next step would be further empowering them to create change in their communities beyond the program. Maybe even inspire them to address some of the societal structures that marginalize them as individuals of minority. For future research it would be interesting to investigate the impact of including social justice education as an aspect of such programs. The focus of such programs can shift from being solely on the individual in isolation, to understanding how the issues in broader society influence them. This is an area that deserves to be investigated further.

Moving forward, research needs to continue to investigate the area of life skill education through physical activity. It is such a relatively new field that a knowledge base needs to be established to encourage further theoretical models and best practices to be developed and put to the test. I encourage those doing this type of work to investigate the possibility of establishing quality university-community collaborations and their potential benefits for both youth and programs. In agreement with Coakley (2002), I encourage those delivering this type of education to not only continue to empower youth within their own lives, but to begin to look at broader social justice issues as well. In doing so we can empower

youth, specifically minority youth, to challenge these issues and move toward a more positive future for themselves and generations to come.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In summary, through this study I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how this physical activity program influenced life skill education amongst youth. This understanding was related to three specific research questions.

First, further understanding regarding how youth within the program experience life skill education was established. It was determined that the program environment offered a place for them to gain competency in life skills. Specifically youth gained further understanding and practice with responsibility, respect, communication, effort, teamwork/cooperation, self-awareness and leadership. This understanding was demonstrated throughout the program, supporting research that TPSR programs are a successful means of educating youth in life skills.

Second, through this study, a deeper understanding of how my role as program leader influenced youths' experience with life skill education was also determined. It was determined that my approach helped create a positive learning environment for life skills education to take place in. Specifically the use of discussions, embedding life skill education, empowerment, modeling, and teachable moments helped contribute to this environment. Empowerment was seen as the most influential aspect of this area as it had significant implications within the group. The importance of empowerment was compounded by youth's position as minorities in society. Research agrees with the idea that empowerment is a crucial aspect of creating positive learning environments where youth, especially minority youth, can succeed.

Third, this study helped develop a deeper understanding of the aspects of the program that facilitate youth's experience with life skill education. Certain aspects of the program were integral in establishing a positive environment where life skill education could take place. Fostering inclusion, fun, emotional and physical safety as well as showing pride in youths' accomplishments and providing quality relational time contributed to the creation of a positive environment within the group. The establishment of this positive environment was key in creating an atmosphere where life skill education could take place successfully. The development of quality relationships with youth in the program was due to efforts by educators. This strong rapport and caring relationships were integral in the establishment of a positive learning environment. Research suggests the establishment of a caring environment through strong relationships between educator and learner has been found to significantly impact learning.

Beyond answering the research questions, the topic of ethnicity arose during the course of the program. The experience of African-Canadian and Muslim youth within our program was positive due to careful pedagogy and strategies to empower youth. These efforts helped to motivate and inspire them within the educational process. This program served as an example for how the topic of ethnicity can be approached within a life skills education setting.

This study provided a strong example of how to practically implement TPSR programs in this type of setting. Effort was made to provide detailed examples and outlines of how the framework was molded to the needs of the program and the

youth it served. This study also demonstrated the effectiveness of having a strong university-community partnership when attempting this type of work.

Is it Worth Doing?

As a final word to anyone attempting this type of work, I would like to take the time to address you specifically. Nick Cutforth, an experienced researcher in the area of physical activity and life skills, wrote an article describing his experience attempting to deliver this type of education within the community (Cutforth, 1997). In it he explained his struggle with the simple question of: Is it worth doing? I have identified with his struggles and triumphs as a researcher/practitioner in this field. I agree with his sentiment that, "Community work is difficult and sometimes draining (yet ultimately immensely satisfying). It is an adventure, like plunging into an activity whose outcome is uncertain and unpredictable. When one is committing oneself in an enduring way to such practice, one's internal motivations are important" (p. 137). Personally, I was motivated to undertake this program because, to put it simply, I felt it was worth doing. As Cutforth continues,

"Often I have real doubts about the success of the program and impact on the needs of the students...There is much frustration, surprise, delight, and sadness in this work. Often I do not know where the work will lead.

Understandings and insights emerge and there are always new possibilities in ways of thinking and working" (p. 138).

Like Cutforth, at times, I too doubted myself, and the success of the program. This type of research is new and often messy, however it is through these struggles

that I can help to contribute and expand the body of knowledge concerning what I feel is such an important area. When I began this process, I had no idea where it would lead. Running this program for the past two years was an unforgettable experience. The understanding and insight that I have gained in the process have proved invaluable to my own development as an educator, researcher, and human being. This is an exciting new field and it is inspiring to be on the cutting edge of such fascinating research. I can only hope that my work can help others in continuing this movement forward in the future. It's not easy, but in the end, I have experienced so much joy during this process to ever give up.

When I ask myself whether this type of work is worth doing, the answer is
a resounding YES!

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Appendix A- Interview Guide

What are some of the things you have done within this program?

- activities
- projects
- mentoring
- running programs

What are some of the achievements you have had within the program?

- projects completed
- knowledge gained
- skills gained
- programs run

What were some of the benefits of participating in this program?

- time with peers
- time with adults
- being physically active
- leadership skills
- life skills

What aspects of the program have helped you learn the most?

- discussions
- physical activities
- leadership activities
- relationship with leaders
- relationship with peers
- challenges faced

How did the leaders help you learn?

- discussions
- leadership activities
- challenges
- expectations

What are some of the issues that you faced within the program?

- peers
- leaders
- activities
- personal
- outside program

What do you think about the program?

- strengths, weaknesses
- things liked, disliked
- best components, poorest components
- things that should be changed

Appendix B- Lesson Plan Examples

Communication

Warm Up:

Individually select one activity (do 3 sets-trying to beat score each time)

Awareness Talk:

Importance of listening skills

Respect people by paying attention

Active listening- trying to understand, waiting until finished, asking for clarity, paraphrasing back to the person.

Activity:

Back Art Relay (Leading the Way Resource)- youth must run to the other end of the gym, look at the picture, then return to their team. They then line up and draw the picture on the back of the person in front of them. This is repeated and the last person then tries to draw the picture on a piece of paper. Both pictures are then compared.

Activity:

Tanks- focus on communicating with your partner for success

Group Talk

What happened during this activity?

What made it hard?

What would make this easier to accomplish?

What can this tell us about communication?

Reflective Question:

Why was it important to communicate today? (write and drop in mailbox)

Effort

Importance of fitness and how it can benefit you if you put the effort in. Fitness can be fun!

Awareness Talk:

Why is fitness important?

- health benefits
- stress- coping
- look good- confidence
- feel good- mood
- makes you more intelligent- helps you learn
- stronger- helps sports and activities

Review how much effort they thought they gave last week. What do you dislike? What did you like?

My goal is to get them to discover that fitness can be fun and doesn't have to be boring like last week, we can find creative ways to be fit, but its up to you individually to push yourself as hard as you want to.

Warm up: Pylons knock down/stand up (two teams)- focus on fitness and how it can be fun!

To get the health benefits of activity, you have to be willing to push yourself- that means don't give up when you start to sweat or breath heavy ITS WHAT YOUR BODY IS SUPPOSED TO DO!

Activity: Basketball!

Group Talk: How was the effort level today? What happened?

Reflective Question: How was your effort today? How did you push yourself today?

Cooperating with others

Warm up: Some wanted to do skipping as a warm up so we changed to this

Everybody up- Trust activity – holding hands, have to try to get up together

Collection of Knots- teamwork, problem solving- tie all knots in rope, all people are holding onto the rope and have to untie it

Awareness Talk:

Self Direction: Being responsible for your own goals and learning. If you want to do or learn something, the only person controlling whether you do/don't is you! Also means being able to work independently and take responsibility when others are not supervising.

Activity:

Stations: Need to divide into groups and pick a game they like. Then groups practice the game individually. Groups then return and instruct the game for the group

Elephant Ball

Flip the Tarp- did this

21

Rock, Paper, Scissors Touchdown

Fake & Take

Design your own game (2 groups did this)

Group Talk:

How did you like working in small groups? How did you like leading your peers?

Reflective Question: Describe what happened when you and your group worked independently.

Leadership

Warm up: Line Ball

Awareness Talk: Leadership- what does it take to be a good leader? Who do you know in your life who is a good example of a leader?

Activity: Cant touch this/Hoopster/Basketball

For each game give each youth the opportunity to be the team leader- they can chose to assign positions, strategy, call timeouts, etc

Group Talk: What did you think about having someone lead the group? Did it work well/not well? Do we have different styles?

Reflective Question: How can you be a leader? What are the qualities of a good leader?